Short Stories.

No. 733.] Week ending January 17th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

(Illustrating a Powerful Incident from our Complete Story, "The Drama of a Day." See inside.)

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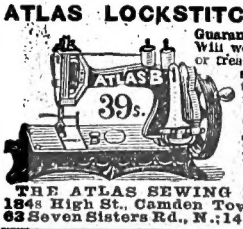

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SHORT STORIES

No. 733.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending January 17th, 1903.

THE DRAMA OF A DAY.

The Tale of a Journalist's Desperate Struggle for Life and Love.

The Story of the Week—See our Coloured Cover.

The Day Opens.

"MANY happy returns, my darling. Did you think I had forgotten?"

The speaker made a swift motion with one closed hand, and a delicate gold chain was flung over a fair head to incircle a slender throat. He had risen from his chair at a dainty breakfast-table and stooped over the woman who sat opposite him. She put up her arms and clasped them about him.

"Gilbert!" she said reproachfully.

Gilbert Hamlyn kissed his pretty wife. He was a tall, dark, reserved looking man, with a sprinkling of grey on his temples and in his moustache. But his eyes dwelt upon the upturned face with a passionate tenderness that beautified them.

"Ella!" he answered, mimicking her banteringly, "there, you are so indulgent to my absent-mindedness that I know you would forgive my even forgetting your birthday. And I really couldn't resist the temptation to make you think I had done so. I bound myself to wait till your second cup of tea, but it was all I could do to hold out. And now, do you like what I have for you? I can't tell you to change it, for it has your name on it."

He opened his hand with mischievous deliberation. In his palm there lay a tiny watch, its gold case rimmed with diamonds and pearls. Hamlyn turned it over—on the back, in brilliants, was the monogram, "E. H."

"How beautiful," cried Ella Hamlyn, taking it, "but, indeed, I did not want anything, Gilbert. You are always giving me jewellery. I have more already than it is wise to keep in a flat. I shall have to deposit some of it with your bank one of these days."

She dropped the watch into her lap and clung to her husband. "Oh, my dear," she said, "you are too, too good to me. Are you sure you can afford it all? I should be happy enough, more than happy, with your love alone."

Gilbert Hamlyn laughed. "Afford it, of course I can," he answered, "it was only yesterday Schillerman gave me a big cheque for royalties. I thought that American book had stopped selling, but it appears not. Truly, darling, America has been a mascot to me, it has given me you, reputation, and quite a gratifying balance in cash."

Ella put an elbow on the table before her, and leant her chin upon it. Her features were those of a resolute, capable, woman, her face seemed as if it had once been much older looking, but had grown, by some magic, younger and happier.

"America!" she murmured; "how I hate the very word. I am an Englishwoman by descent, why could I not have been an Englishwoman by birth? Then I should have escaped

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—what should I not have escaped? Shame, humiliation, squalor, the shadow of crime."

Her husband drew her to him. "My darling!" he whispered, "did you not promise me that you would try not to remember?"

Ella Hamlyn brushed away a tear. "I can't help it," she said, "I do try, Gilbert, for your sake. Oh, why couldn't I have met you when I was a girl—free, merry, ignorant!—instead of meeting—Robert Lorimer? What right have I to be the wife of such a man as you, I that have been wife to 'Kentucky Bob,' 'Bob the Crook,' 'Bob the confidence-man.' I that have been known, and pitied, by the police in half the great towns of the States?"

Hamlyn pinched the pink lobe of a small, well-shaped ear.

"Ella," he said, "you know that I never argue with you in these moods. They are foolish, unreasonable, unfair to yourself. It was not your fault that, as a girl, you made a girl's mistake, and plighted your troth to a plausible scoundrel. Had you been born in England we might never have met, which might not have been your loss, though it would certainly have been mine."

He stroked the soft tendrils of fair hair that clustered naturally about her brow.

"I love you for what you are, dear," he murmured, "a brave, upright, experienced woman, who has come through the fire without even the odour of burning upon her garments."

Gilbert Hamlyn was silent for a moment, then he roused himself, and resumed his rallying tone.

"I was going to come home early to-night," he said, "and take you to the theatre. For once the paper can go to press without me. But, as you have misbehaved yourself, I think I shall change my mind."

Ella lifted her head and tried to smile, though the tears were hanging upon her lashes.

"I am silly," she confessed, "and selfish as well. I ought to be happy if only I can make you happy. And this is not the way to do it. But if you knew how things conspire to remind me! I cannot actually touch the piano, without feeling myself back in that horrid little dime museum, strumming on that awful tin-kettle they called an instrument."

"I wonder however you managed to get a bar of melody out of it," said her husband cheerfully, emptying his tea-cup, "but you did. Though I expect Mascagni would have fainted to hear its top-notes in the Intermezzo. Never mind, you played well enough to make me take the liberty of speaking to you."

"And of waiting to walk home with me," added his wife, "which was a much greater liberty."

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"How vexed you were!" exclaimed Gilbert Hamlyn; "but I plead love at first sight. I read it all in a glance. Crape at your throat, a wedding-ring on your finger, bitterness in your face—a disappointed wife, freed by death and captured by poverty. But what a queer, happy little courtship I had!"

He was gathering up a medley of documents from a writing-table as he spoke.

"Sweet as are the pleasures of reminiscence, my darling," he observed, "I must be off. You would marry a slave of the journalistic lamp."

His wife went for his hat and coat. He put them on, a grave, almost melancholy figure. But he drew her into his embrace with the ardour of a stripling.

"You shall have your theatre, after all," he said, "be happy, dear. I ask no more from you ever, than that you should be very, very happy."

Their lips met lingeringly, mutely, and Gilbert Hamlyn tore himself away. From the lofty window of the flat Ella watched him thread the busy West-end street.

"My dear, dear husband!" she murmured; "so loyal, so tender, so generous." She pressed her finger-tips to her quivering mouth, to hold back the sob that ended the words. "I must be happy," she said, "he wishes it. I will forget."

She sat down at a small concert grand and began to touch the notes; she played well and firmly, with a style more masculine than feminine. She glided into the famous and beautiful, if hackneyed "Intermezzo," she had been playing it in a wretched and half-empty Western "show"—playing it sadly, abstractedly, despairingly, and when she had finished she had looked up to see for the first time the face of Gilbert Hamlyn and to hear his grave "Thank you." It had been the beginning of an acquaintanceship that had meant much to Robert Lorimer's widow.

"If you please, ma'am, a person to see you."

Ella started. A white-capped maid had come into the room. Her mistress rose from the piano.

"A person!" she repeated; "what kind of a person?"

The girl prefaced her answer with a little jerk indicative of contempt. "A man, ma'am," she intimated, "very shabbily dressed. He says he must see you on business, and that you'll know him when you see him."

Ella Hamlyn smiled. "What a singular message!" she commented, "however, in that case, perhaps I had better see him, whether he sees me or not. Where is he?"

"In the hall, ma'am," she was told.

A light step carried Ella to the door of the room, and she peeped out into the tiny square ante-chamber of the compactly-built flat. In it there stood a lean, brown-skinned, sinewy fellow, with a soft felt hat in his restless fingers. At the sight of him Ella Hamlyn recoiled.

"I—I will speak to him, Ruth," she stammered; "you may show him in."

The maid stole an inquisitive glance at her and retired. In another moment her visitor had been ushered in and the door was closing upon the curious Ruth.

Ella had drawn herself up, very pale and stern.

"So, Jim Spinifex," she said, "you have dared to track me down. For no good purpose, I'll be sworn. Do not think that you can blackmail me, my husband knows all, he knew all when he married me."

The other grinned. "Well guessed, Ellie," he responded, "but don't be too quick. I knew fast enough you'd have told Hamlyn the truth, you always were that sort. But don't—don't——"

He drew nearer, screening his mouth with a hollowed palm.

"Don't call him your husband," she was bidden, "he can scarcely lay claim to the title so long as—as Bob Lorime is alive."

Ella gasped and caught at the table to steady herself.

"Bob!" she said, in a horrified whisper. "Bob alive?" The man she had called Jim Spinifex nodded.

She moaned and hid her face. Mr. James Spinifex shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll allow it's a bit of a jolt for you," he added, "but that's the fact. Howsomever, I'm not disposed to be hard on you, and Bob having sent me over here to make inquiries I can as easy put him off the scent as not. If you like I can tell him you're dead and buried, and then you'll be safe from him for good. The question is, how'll it pan out for me if I do?"

Ella was swaying to and fro. "Bob!" she murmured "Bob alive—and I his wife—not—not Gilbert's."

Jim Spinifex trifled with his soft hat. "Take it cool," he said. "All I want is to be paid for the trouble of holding my tongue. Hamlyn need never know. See here, I'll be content with a thousand dollars—two hundred pounds, and you can send it me by instalments. Fifty pounds'll do me now, in cash or jewellery. That's a pretty thing you've got on."

He extended his hand to the jewelled watch that swung at her belt. Ella sprang back and touched the bell.

"Go! go!" she exclaimed, "the sight of you is hideous to me. You contaminate his house with your presence. Go."

Her visitor faced her threateningly. "Not me!" he retorted; "I suppose you don't want me to go to Hamlyn and tell him you're not his wife."

Ella sneered. "Fool!" she said, "that would do you no good. Fate has tied a knot and I must untie it as best I can. But you will not stand to win by my method of doing it."

The other stared at her. "What are you going to do?" he queried.

Ella wrung her hands. "What do wounded creatures do?" she asked, wildly. "Creep away and hide themselves from all the world. Go, before I send for the police to fling you out."

Mr. Spinifex's jaw dropped and a low whistle broke from him. The maid was opening the door of the room. He turned and went out, muttering to himself in a dazed kind of fashion.

The Day Closes.

"RUTH, is your mistress not at home?"

Gilbert Hamlyn was standing on the threshold of the small kitchen of the rear of his flat. He had just entered with his latch-key and found the other rooms of the suite in darkness. The parlour-maid rose from the tea-table, where she had been gossiping confidentially with her fellow-servant.

"No, sir," she said. "Mrs. Hamlyn went out this morning about ten, sir. I got a cab for her, sir, and she took a hand-bag. And if you please, sir, she left a note for you on the toilet-table."

Hamlyn reflected an instant. Then he took a match-box from his pocket, passed into his own and his wife's sleeping apartment and lit the gas. On the toilet-table there lay a square, delicately-tinted envelope, addressed to him in her familiar handwriting. He picked it up and opened it, muttering a mild anathema.

"Called away suddenly, I suppose," he said. "Someone must be ill, yet she has so few friends in Eng——"

The word was left unfinished, and he started violently. His eye had fallen on the letter. It was brief and amazing.

"*I must go away and leave you—for ever. Something has happened. Never seek to learn what. I have taken nothing but a few clothes and a little money. I could not take any of your presents. Blame me, hate me, forget me. Good-bye.*—

"ELLA."

The paper fluttered from Hamlyn's fingers. The wife of a

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twelve-month, and gone from him without a word of explanation!

He had rescued her from what a depth of misery and danger, and she had deserted him! That was what the world would call it—deserted! Gilbert Hamlyn ground his teeth; he was a proud man.

Gradually his love—the strong, steady, pitiful love of a generous man—reasserted itself. There was some mystery behind this sudden departure. He knew that she loved him, not with the caprice of a girl, but with the passionate self-surrender and pathetic trust of a woman who had suffered and found consolation. He remembered her strange, tender mood of the morning.

Putting his cold hands to his burning forehead he tried to think. While he stood, wrestling for self-control, the parlour-maid's voice came to him arousingly.

"Please, sir," he was informed, "a person to see you. He won't give his name, but it's the same one as called to see Mrs. Hamlyn this morning. He wouldn't give his name then, either!"

Gilbert Hamlyn turned, bewildered yet attracted by the reference to the unknown morning visit. But he was too reserved to question a servant.

"Very well," he said, pulling himself together and crumpling the letter in his palm. "You may show him into the drawing-room. I will see him at once."

He glanced at his face in the mirror as he passed it—he seemed to have grown suddenly very white and old. He threw off his overcoat and wiped the perspiration from his brow—it had broken forth in drops of beaded sweat. Then he entered the drawing-room and paused, surprised at the sight of his shabby, sinister-looking caller.

"I—I have not the pleasure of knowing you, I believe," he began. The other interrupted him with a gesture.

"My name is Spinifex," he said, and his accent was that of a low class American from the Western States. "There's no reason why you should know it, but I don't think it can do any harm."

"Upon my word, Mr.—Spinifex," observed Hamlyn coldly, "you take an extraordinary tone. May I ask the reason for this visit?"

"You may," he was answered. "I believe you have quite recently discovered your loss of something that many men would give a good deal to lose, but which, I daresay, you would not be sorry to regain, need I say that I allude to your wife?"

Gilbert Hamlyn strolled forward and seized the speaker by the collar. "Blackguard and scoundrel!" he said hoarsely, "for blackguard and scoundrel you are, it is written in your face. What do you know of my wife?"

Mr. James Spinifex threw off his grasp.

"Go slow," he observed, "you can't bluff me, and I don't need to bluff you. I know something that you want to know, and whether you end by knowing it or not depends on me."

He studied Gilbert Hamlyn with insolent deliberation.

"You want your wife's present address," he said; "well, I've got it—in my head, and nowhere else. There's only one thing that will bring it out, and that's dollars. You'll never find your wife again on your own, and you couldn't persuade her to come back if you did. Now, if you're in the mind to part with a couple of thousand dollars, and will put yourself in my hands, you shan't regret it."

"And if I refuse?" demanded Hamlyn. Mr. Spinifex snapped his fingers.

"I guess you can say good-bye to Mrs. H. for the rest of your earthly career!"

Hamlyn hesitated.

"Why has she gone away?" he asked.

Mr. Spinifex made a motion of irritation.

"Hadn't you better ask her that?" he said. "If you've got the cash, or can get it, I'll manage you an interview with her at once, if not you'll have to wait. But this is a case in which there's no time like the present."

Gilbert Hamlyn touched the bell.

"Supposing, Mr. Spinifex," he remarked, "I were to send for a policeman and have you arrested?"

The other sat down and stretched out his legs indolently.

"Go ahead," he said, "only I guess her name will be in all the papers to-morrow and her history. 'Ellie Lorimer, relict of the well-known crook and swindler, Bob Lorimer, and now wife of Mr. Gilbert Hamlyn, the successful writer.' H'm!"

Hamlyn abandoned the bell.

"Very well," he answered, slowly, "you and I, Mr. Spinifex, will have a little deal together. And if you play me false I shall know what course to take."

He re-entered the lighted bedroom, wrote out a cheque, and put on his overcoat.

"What am I risking?" he said to himself. "Possibly a great deal! Would to Heaven I had not lent my revolver! But there is no time to get it back, or opportunity to get another. Stay!"

He went out into the hall, took a thick walking-stick from the stand and felt it peculiarly. It was a sword-stick he had carried once or twice on special "commissions," when a firearm would have been inadmissible. The spring was in order, and the blade slid easily in its sheath. He put the stick under his arm, picked up his gloves, and regained the threshold of the drawing-room.

"I am at your service," he said. Mr. Spinifex bowed, clapped on his soft hat, and followed the journalist into the open air.

Hamlyn hailed a cab.

"I shall have to call on a friend as we go, for some cash," he remarked, "after that, no doubt you will direct the driver." His companion assented curtly, and Hamlyn gave the jehu the address. For the cab to reach it, for Hamlyn to leave Mr. Spinifex and return, was but the work of a quarter of an hour. As the journalist emerged from the shop of a large art dealer and jeweller in Piccadilly, the American stood up on the front of the hansom and spoke to the driver. The locality that he mentioned was a street in Pimlico not far from Victoria. The cabman saluted with his whip and drove off.

During the journey neither Hamlyn nor his companion spoke, each was covertly watching the other. At the point specified by the American they descended and the latter paid the fare. This done he grasped the journalist's arm.

"Pardon me, Mr. Hamlyn!" he observed, "but this is a curious neighbourhood, and you had better let me pilot you."

Hamlyn yielded reluctantly, to be led through street after street each dingier and more squalid than the other. Mr. Spinifex was evidently taking, of set purpose, a confusing route. Hamlyn lost track of his movements completely.

Finally his guide halted, and, drawing Hamlyn down a flight of area steps, tapped on a door at the bottom. At the end of a flagged passage, however, beyond the threshold of a room, a lamp was burning. The American pushed his companion towards it, and they gained a large, bare sitting-room, with dusty, barred windows, looking on a back street, where a gas flame was burning in a bracket attached to a wall. There were long serge curtains to the windows, Spinifex crossed and drew them closely.

The man who had ushered them into the apartment was short and square-shouldered, with a sullen, low-browed visage, and soiled, much crumpled linen.

"Waal," he said in a drawling nasal twang, "so you've got our joker. I reckon he's not come empty-handed?"

"I guess not," was the answer. "And now, Mr. Hamlyn, you have another thing to do, that is, to write a little note to your wife."

Gilbert Hamlyn started.

"Then she is not here!" he exclaimed.

"Not much!" said the shorter of the two Americans, "that's what your note is for, to bring her here. Luckily for

you, Spinifex had me wait about for her this morning and follow her when she came out, or she'd have given all of us the slip."

"That's so!" added Mr. Spinifex, thrusting towards him a blotting pad, a bad pen, some cheap note paper, and some envelopes. "And a line will do it, something like this:

"MY DEAR WIFE—*I am in the power of dangerous enemies. My life will depend on your accompanying the bearer. You will recognise my ring which I give him to show you. Be swift and secret.*

"Not bad, aye, for an impromptu. That turquoise of yours is just the thing, and it will do for a keepsake for Hoby, won't it, Hoby?"

His assistant smiled grimly. "I guess I'm not likely to be able to spare it back again. Hurry up, Hamlyn, if you want Mrs. H. to be here to-night."

"Yes, get a move on you," said Spinifex sharply; "it's easy enough. When Mrs. Hamlyn left the flat she went to a big hotel, booked a room in a false name and settled down for a spell. Ellie Lorimer never was a fool, and she knows that to lie low under the hunter's nose is the best way of putting him off the track. Hoby will slip up with your note, and bring her down in a cab. Just you write as I dictate."

Gilbert Hamlyn took up the pen and put it down again. "I will not write a lie to entrap my wife," he exclaimed; "how do I know what your plan is?"

"Bah!" retorted Spinifex, "I could forge just such a letter, take your ring by force, and get her here on my own. But I want your fist, it's safer. And as for the lie—I'll soon make it true."

He lowered his hand to his heel, pulled from his boot a gleaming sheath-knife, and held the point to Hamlyn's throat.

"Write!" he said, brutally. A curious smile crossed Hamlyn's face, and he obeyed without further parley.

A few moments later Hoby's square, slouching form was disappearing through the door on his mission. Spinifex motioned the journalist to a battered sofa, and sat down himself, laying his knife on his knee.

He lit a cigarette and puffed at it calmly. Hamlyn, his stick planted between his knees, his palms crossed upon the horn handle, regarded him steadily. Slowly the journalist's fingers changed their position, so slowly that a church clock hard by had chimed out two quarters before they settled upon the hidden spring.

"You have remarkably large rats here," he said, glancing across the room. "May I ask if you make pets of them?" Spinifex started, caught up his dagger, and turned his head. "Rats," he ejaculated incredulously, "where?"

There was a gleam of steel in the air, and he looked back again towards the journalist to find a slender blade pointed at his breast.

"A word, a motion," said Gilbert Hamlyn, "and you are a dead man!"

The American laughed in his face, struck the sword blade aside with his dagger, and slipping out of his chair darted, weapon in hand, at the journalist.

Well was it for Gilbert Hamlyn that he was a practised amateur of fencing—in a dagger and rapier duel the dagger wielder is at an advantage. His short, strong blade forms a more powerful lever in a parry, and if he can but get inside his adversary's reach he has him at his mercy.

The American having shown fight, Gilbert Hamlyn knew his danger and leapt back. Spinifex followed him up, and the two sprang from side to side of the room with agile, tactlike footsteps, thrusting and parrying as they went.

Driven to bay in a corner, the journalist lunged, and his point pricked the American's shoulder, but before he could recover his weapon, Hamlyn had received at close quarters a stab with the American sheath-knife that made him reel. It had been planted over the heart. But luckily he wore his watch in an upper pocket, and the metal had turned the blow. Spinifex felt it, and struck again; the blade gashed the muscles of the swordsman's right fore-arm.

Suddenly he saw that the American had backed to the fire, and was striving with one hand to extricate a folded paper from his pocket. Succeeding, he swerved, and, still standing on his guard, flung the paper towards the fire. It missed the bars, and fell upon the hearth.

The American stooped sideways to pick up the paper. Hamlyn flung himself upon him. Sword and dagger met, clashed, and the point of the long blade buried itself in the throat of James Spinifex. He staggered and fell, the dagger wrested from his hand.

Hamlyn snatched up the paper. A leaping flame of the fire illumined it. It was an attested copy of an American death certificate. And the name of the dead was Robert Lorimer!

As he stood wondering what it might mean, there was the sound of feet in the passage without. Hamlyn dropped his weapon, caught up a clumsy poker from the grate, and leapt to the side of the door. It opened, and his wife entered the darkened room followed by the man Hoby. As the latter passed the hidden journalist, Hamlyn struck desperately with all his force at the American's head. He fell with a groan.

Gilbert Hamlyn threw down the poker, caught his wife in his arms, and drew her through the door, down the passage, and out into the street. He had forgotten his trusty sword stick, but in his hand he still clutched mechanically the attested death certificate of his wife's first husband.

* * * * *

The servants at the flat stared when their master and mistress came back together, and they saw that Gilbert Hamlyn's right arm was tightly bound with a crimson handkerchief and his face rather paler than its wont. Ella had somehow staunched the bleeding in the obscurity of the four-wheeler which had brought them from Pimlico, and in which she and her husband had exchanged their amazed and amazing explanations.

The discreet doctor who was sent for to provide the wound with more professional bandages asked no questions, but warned his patient to rest for a day or two.

When he had gone there was a romantic little supper at the flat, during which Gilbert Hamlyn and his wife sat on the same side of the table, and talked a great deal, if they did not eat much.

"It was a clever lie, my darling," said the journalist at last, "but thank Heaven it failed. Yet, if they had not laid a second plot to get us both into their power and exact I know not what terms from us, it might have succeeded, at least in parting us, if not in enriching them. But I am glad I gave the scoundrels their deserts. I wonder if I ought to have informed the police—I may have killed one or other of the villains."

Ella shivered. "Wait," she said, "we will look in the papers for a day or two and see if anything is reported."

"Discretion is the better part of—honesty!" commented her husband. "Well, we will lie low, for a time at any rate."

As it proved, they had no need ever to depart from their policy of silence and inaction. The Americans, killed or wounded, were never heard of again. And it was in vain that the journalist explored the recesses of Pimlico in search of the scene of his desperate duel.

R. Norman Silver.

£5 A Week for Life!

This is the

HUGE PRIZE OFFERED BY

Pearson's Weekly.

For Particulars, See Page 85.

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ONE TOUCH OF CUPID.

Which Gives Us Fresh Views of Life.

She had always been counted, above all else, a good woman. Indeed, goodness was so entirely the aim of her existence, the incentive for her strivings, that she fell into the common error of narrowing her life and its interests.

That hers was the virtue of the untried, the untempted, she did not know, and not knowing, she deemed herself strong and brave and true.

The rigid line along which her life was patterned formed the criterion by which she judged others. Consequently her judgment was often severe.

She looked with disgust upon the follies and weaknesses of other women. In her eyes there was never justification for sin.

"Women should so train their wills that temptation should be impossible," was her verdict always.

Duty being the keynote of her life, it came about that she married a man whom she "esteemed" but did not love. True, there was no one else whom she loved at that time. Nevertheless, somewhere in the exalted regions of her nature was a sense that told her how inadequate was the placid response which this man's regard awakened in her.

She felt instinctively that she would never be really happy with him. There were chords in her being which he never touched, depths which his love of her did not stir.

But she made up her mind to be content and to forget the visions of forbidden blessedness which that inner sense had told her was hers by right.

So she married and settled down to an existence of seeming happiness. The world spoke of the match as ideal and envied her the harmony of her lot, for the world knew nothing of her subjective life.

There were times when dissatisfaction lifted its head and stared her relentlessly in the face. Times when the old dreams and imaginings came thronging back. But she stifled them resolutely. Had she not promised to be true? To her that meant true in thought as well as deed.

With the birth of her little girl came new duties, new interests to fill the blanks and hollows of her existence. In watching the baby form develop, the precious mind unfold, she forgot dissatisfaction.

For three years she lived in this new-found happiness and smiled to feel that the old restlessness had left her, never to return.

Then she met the other man.

The revelation did not come at once. There was a vague intimation of it perhaps the first instant that her glance met his. But it was in talking with him of the things she loved that she first felt the delicious dawning of a joy never before experienced.

"It is mental congeniality," her heart explained to her conscience, for she wanted above all things to be honest with herself.

But as the days sped by she found the changing situation harder to explain. This new exhilaration, this wonderful joyousness—what was it? Why was it? Could simply the pleasure of a hostess in entertaining her husband's friend be such as this?

Then came the flashing moment of ecstasy when her wide eyes, meeting his, read the whole truth, and, reading it, gazed back in mingled fright and shame and joy.

In the quiet of her room that night she tried to think, to reason, to explain. But instead of the firmness and high resolve which she had always believed would be hers under such circumstances, she felt a wild wish to hug this great gladness to her heart and keep it always.

In vain did she chide herself, over and over. In vain did she lean above her sleeping child, reminding her soul again and again of the sacred calling which was hers. No thought of husband, child or duty could drown the music of this great experience.

A long night of reproaches and resolves made her no less responsive to the glow and thrill of the other man's presence next day. In shame and in delight she let her gaze drink deep of the concentrated sweetness in his eyes.

She would not think now, nor reason. She would not face herself as before in the quiet of her room. Beyond the present she cared not to live.

To see him daily, to talk with him, to feel that he loved her, was happiness so great that neither remorse nor resolve could strangle it.

"I am going away," he said to her, a week earlier than his intended departure.

Stunned by the unexpectedness of the announcement, unable to consider anything save the one black thought that he was to leave her, she stood facing him dumbly, her eyes fully speaking the despair that descended upon her.

"You understand," he said at length, as he released her hand.

"Yes," she said, "I understand."

He left that afternoon. She made some excuse and did not accompany her husband to the station with his friend.

As she saw the carriage drive away, it seemed to her that she must and would do some desperate thing. But she did nothing more desperate than to sit with clenched hands and miserable eyes, staring blankly at surroundings from which all shine and colour were now blotted out.

Months passed before her struggling will could assert itself above the awful numbness and despair which had threatened to throttle it. But the time did come, at last, when she could look at the world again with calm eyes of hope and faith.

It was then she felt the transformation. It was then she knew that in place of her former harshness and prejudice was a warm, sweet kindness, a great compassion, a wide sympathy for all those on earth, whose fate it seems to suffer and to love.

Angela Morgan.

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THE DESPISER OF LOVE.

The Story of a Man who Chose Wealth.

THERE was a strong personality about Edwin Dale that raised him far above his fellow clerks at Chard's Bank. On the best of terms with one and all, yet none could say they knew him well. Some indefinable characteristic in his nature acted as a barrier to anything approaching friendship, and, apart from the daily association his fellow clerks had with him in the routine of their avocations, Dale was a stranger to them.

Different from most men, he seemed totally unaware of the existence of personal pronouns, and as reserved men always seem to be keeping something back, endless efforts were made off and on by the *employés* at Chard's to learn something of this enigma. But they were as ignorant at the end of twelve months as on the first day Dale joined the firm.

The various heads of the firm considered him a model clerk. He was as punctual as the sun, and accurate and precise in everything he did, and at the time of the opening of this story had just been appointed confidential clerk to the junior partner, Mr. Arthur Chard.

It was an old custom at Chard's that when one of the rank and file received sudden promotion to any important or confidential position, to celebrate it in the form of a supper, for which the recipient of the new post had the privilege of paying. On this occasion, however, and it was openly mooted as being the only one on record, there was no conviviality.

Dale explained that he knew what was the custom, and what he was expected to do, but pleaded indisposition—he called it liver. He hoped, nevertheless, that his enforced absence would not in any way interfere with the ancient precepts being upheld, and he would be more than pleased if they would allow him the privilege of suggesting that the Holborn——

His little speech was not permitted to go beyond that point, for one of the features of the supper was the ceremonials attached to it, which naturally necessitated the presence of the principal. So the supper was indefinitely postponed.

The possession of an affected liver is an affliction that only those who have realised the ownership of that special piece of the internal anatomy can truly understand and sympathise with, yet Dale, despite his, managed to demolish a good many epicurean dishes at his club that same evening, and as we find him now—is calmly smoking a cigar with two aristocratic-looking young men, while taking sips of liqueur coffee.

"What are you going to do with yourself to-night, Dale?" asks the elder of the two strangers.

"Oh, I think I shall turn in—I feel as if everything jars to-night."

"Come and have a turn in the card-room," suggests the other.

"I never play cards," Dale quietly replies.

"What's the difference between cards and backing a horse, old chap? Come, that's straining at the gnat a little, isn't it?"

"There's a vast difference. You back a horse by speaking three words, or by a mere nod—but cards, pshaw! breathing bad air, smoking, drinking, and losing a night's rest!"

"If Dale did that, what on earth would become of Chard's Bank, I wonder?"

"Oh, I suppose I should be compelled to resign, and no doubt my successor would be chosen from that class who have no brains to fuddle."

"Thanks, Dale."

"Well, you asked for it, Jack."

"If Dale is really going, I'll give you one in five for fifty, Jack."

"Not good enough; I'll take two hundred."

"Split it?"

"Any way you like."

"I wonder," thought Dale, as he slowly strode along Pall Mall, "what those two men would do if they knew I was on the brink of—of what—say ruin? This is almost Thursday. By Monday I must raise two thousand seven hundred. If I owed it to a man I don't think I would have any compunction in being dubbed a defaulter, but I cannot, no I cannot let Jessie in, she has sacrificed a lot for me, and I've been blackguard enough in that quarter. No, I see but one course open. It will provide the evening papers with a good bill. Absconding bank clerk—enormous defalcations—yes, and as soon as Jessie saw it she would return the two-seven to Chard's. I'll go to see her now."

"Is Miss Caister in and alone?" Dale asked the question from the boy in charge of the lift at Cambridge Mansions.

"I think so, sir, but I've been away for my supper. Going up, sir?"

"Yes."

Arrived on the fourth floor, he quickly crossed the balcony, and touched the electric bell on the door, whereon "Miss Caister" was printed.

"Is Miss Caister in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"She is, sir."

"That will do, I know the way."

In a room furnished with exquisite taste—if slightly foreign in appearance, sat Jessie Caister reading. When she heard the well-known footsteps of Dale she ran to meet him.

"Oh, Eddy, my love, this is kind of you. Have you come for supper? Are you in a hurry, because I will order it at once if you are?"

"No, dear, I'm neither in a hurry nor hungry. I've come just to have a talk—if you'll have me."

"Ah, but have you come to talk to me nicely, or to hedge that bet on Will-o'-the-Wisp?"

"Who told you that I had a bet on Will-o'-the-Wisp?"

"Sir John Farren himself. He came this morning and asked me what the price was. I told him——"

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"A hundred to six."

"And then he offered to buy part of the book."

"The fool."

"I don't think he is a fool at all. He certainly allows that man Edgcombe to sponge dreadfully, but apart from that I don't think Sir John is at all foolish. But we are talking shop. Come and sit here by me, and put your arms round me, and love me as you used to do."

"No, dear, I would bore you, I——"

"You bore me, Eddie, you know you couldn't."

"It is sweet of you to say so, dear, but what I want is sleep. Let me lie down here for an hour, will you?"

"Will I? You stupid boy. Now wait a minute, don't be so impatient. Lift your head—no, this way. Isn't that better?"

"Yes, darling."

"Are you warm enough, or shall I put this rug round you?"

"Put it over my feet. Ah, that's splendid. Call me when it's time for me to go."

"Is that all?"

"All! What do you mean?"

"Don't you want a kiss?"

This was the lady bookmaker over whom all London was agog. No paper with a society column but had some personal item concerning Miss Jessie Caister—the usual paragraphs. How she preferred her soup cold, and never was known to tie her bootlaces in a double knot. Rumour, and the ever-moving current report, gave the most brilliant details of her career, all of which were wonderful pieces of news to the lady herself.

One particular item of *truth*, however, if put up for auction in Fleet Street, would have obtained a fabulous price, but that was a secret between Jessie and Dale.

And she sat in the subdued light watching the sleeping form of the man she loved, not a movement of his escaped her. If in restless turnings he moved the cushion from beneath his head, she would promptly and gently replace it. She was perfectly happy, and he?

The tender pressure of her lips—their very warmth, was still upon his when his brain became troubled with dreams. At first they were mere reflections of his active thoughts, the passing in a clouded phantasm of daily scenes and troubles. A period of deep sleep followed. Then he became conscious that he was dreaming again, but the dream took the form more of a vision. Someone was speaking to him, he knew not whom, nor could he tell what was said at first. Gradually, however, the buzzing in his ears took more definite sound, and he saw a figure kneeling beside him—and understood.

In his imagination he said to the figure at his side:

"Have you come to warn me?"

"No, to offer you your choice. Which will you have?—and your wish shall be granted. Honour, health, fame, happiness, or wealth?"

"Give me wealth—give me wealth."

"Eddie, Eddie, wake up."

"Give me, give me, oh——"

"What, dear—some water?"

"I was dreaming, Jessie."

"You are ill, darling. Do let me give you something—a little brandy?"

"No, I will go home. I'm all right except a touch of liver; it will be well in the morning."

And he went.

Settling day arrived, and Dale had failed to raise the necessary money. On the way to the office he pondered deeply over his affairs. His objection to robbing Chard's bank was not from any sense of honour—for he was absolutely unscrupulous—but it would end all his scheming and ambition.

"I will see Jessie and put her off for a week and do a plunge. It is my only chance!" he muttered, as he entered the bank.

Fate, however, in the shape of a fortune, rescued him from himself. Some old idiot—his thankful way of putting it—had left him seven or eight thousand a year. The old idiot in question was his father, who had died without leaving a will—at least none was found, fortunately for Edwin Dale, for he had long left the family circle with the proverbial shilling.

As soon as all the necessary legal arrangements were settled, Dale went away, "to let the thing blow over a bit," was his motive.

Much talk ensued at the club over Dale's good luck, but the general surprise was nobody knew Dale possessed a father. Major Bousfell and Sir John Farren were discussing Dale and his affairs one morning, and Sir John staggered the Major by remarking:

"I suppose he will marry Jessie Caister, now?"

"By Heavens, I hope not!"

"Ah, Major, have you a tender spot for that quarter?"

"Not I, my boy. I was meaning that Jessie Caister is far too good for him."

"You haven't a very exalted opinion of Dale seemingly?"

"I should think not; he is a cold-blooded cur!"

"I say, that's strong for you, Major."

"Yes, but I mean it."

"Well, I think Dale is strangely selfish, but I am certain Jessie Caister loves him—dotes on him."

"Aye, and he?"

"Who could fathom that statue?"

For six months nothing was heard of Dale. He seemed to have dropped completely out of existence. Sir John Farren was ruminating over the fact one Saturday morning. Sir John was an ardent footballer, and every Saturday during the winter assiduously scanned the lists of the teams in the sporting papers, and seeing the name of Dale, of course it recalled memories of Edwin.

"Hullo, Jack!" The newcomer was Major Bousfell. "Have you seen this?" handing over a paper.

"The vile sneak!" remarked Sir John after reading. "It's odd, I was just thinking of him. But how on earth has this come about?"

"Simple as possible. The Earl of Torpington and family are at Cannes for the winter. Dale has evidently found the climate there equally charming."

"It will kill Jessie Caister."

"Not it; she will be well out of it."

"I'll go to see her."

"Don't, Jack. She'll never like you again if you tell her. Your presence will always recall the misery—take my tip!"

"No; I'm off at once."

Ten minutes sufficed to reach Cambridge Mansions.

"You are an early visitor, Sir John."

"Yes. I say, Miss Caister, I wish you would drop the handle, I hate it!"

"But I cannot call you Mr. Farren."

"Why not call me Jack like the others? And you and I are such old friends! I mean to call you Jessie. Miss Caister is such a lot to get out, isn't it?"

"Yes—Jack."

"Now, Jessie, I want you to think as well of me as you can, because I'm going to run the risk of—of making you hate and despise me!"

"Whatever is coming? Are you broke, Jack?"

That was the maximum of calamities that Jessie thought could be wrong with Sir John Farren.

"No. I am not going to speak about myself at all. And, first of all, I'm going to ask you a question, and don't think it is out of mere curiosity or impertinent."

"You are going to frighten me, Sir John."

"Sir!"

"I mean Jack."

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"Do you love Edwin Dale? Oh, Jessie, forgive me. I was brutal to ask so bluntly."

"Tell me all—quick, quick, is he dead?"

"No."

"He is ill, dying in some foreign land, and I here? Oh, tell me where he is."

"He is neither ill nor dying, but, Jessie, he is dead to you."

"To me?"

"Don't you understand? He is a cur and has——"

"No, no, you don't know. What has he done? I forgive him, whatever it is—even if it is murder."

"He is married."

"Married!" with a gasp.

"Yes, he's married Lady Isobel, second daughter of the Earl of Torpington."

"Leave me, Jack."

"No, I won't yet."

"I want to be alone—to think."

"Let me manage a bit for you. How is your book?"

"Full. I shall never take another bet. This is the hand of Providence; I should never have taken up such an unwomanly occupation!"

"Nonsense! I'll take your book over, if you'll let me."

"No, Jack. I mean what I said, so do go."

"And you won't hate me for bringing this bad news; but remember you have escaped marrying a blackguard!"

"I shall never hate you, whatever you do; you have been very kind to me this morning. I would rather have heard it from you than anyone. Now go."

"Now, then, Jack, you fool, pull yourself together, else you'll be in fine trim this afternoon," and with this admonition to himself he walked off as straight as a British soldier—which he was.

* * * * *

"I am going with father and the girls to Daly's to-night. Will you drop in?"

"I may if I get back in time, but in all probability I will have to run down to Newmarket."

"Whatever for, Edwin?"

"Well, you see, Isobel, every man in my position is supposed to do something these days, so I mean to keep a few horses."

"But we have enough, surely?"

"I mean racehorses, my dear."

"Oh, Edwin, cannot you find anything else than that?"

"I knew, of course, that you would object to any scheme I suggested, particularly if it would give me pleasure."

"I hate betting and horse-racing."

"Don't be foolish, Isobel! It is the duty of those who can afford it to try to improve the breed of racers in England to purify the turf generally."

"I am sure your motives are purely philanthropical, dear, but I dislike the idea all the same."

"Of course you do! You dislike anything I do, and will soon dislike me also, I suppose."

"Is that kind, Edwin?"

"Well you goad me to saying nasty things. You seem perpetually trying to thwart me."

"Do I, Edwin? Well, I won't even comment on your doings for the future, except that I do wish you would see someone about your cough."

"Oh, hang the cough! I beg your pardon, Isobel; come back—I am very sorry. Isobel!"

She had gone.

"I wonder what on earth is the matter with me. I used to have myself under better control. Isobel is very irritating sometimes; she either can't, or won't, see how her constant worrying annoys me, but I was a fool to swear. Yes, I'll go and see her."

Without speaking or knocking, he made an attempt to open the door of his wife's boudoir, but found it locked.

"Let me in, Isobel!" he asked pleadingly.

No answer.

"Isobel! Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear, but I am busy, and prefer my own company just at present."

Dale's lips twitched slightly; it was a unique experience for him to be baulked in anything.

"Open this door at once, or I'll smash it in."

"Please yourself, of course."

For a moment his temper got the better of him, and he burst open the lock and entered the room.

"You had better continue the dictates of your breeding, and beat me now."

"Look here, madam"—grasping her by the wrist—"I want you to fully understand that I am the master of this house, and will be obeyed. Don't think you've got one of your blue-blooded puppets to deal with now."

"At least the blue-blooded puppets don't bully and swear at their wives. Edwin, you are hurting my wrist. Edwin, oh, you brute!" With an effort she managed to escape from him.

"My Lady Isobel requires taming, and objects to the process."

"You will not have the opportunity of repeating your cruelty."

"Ah, you purpose showing only the velvet paw—a wise discretion on your part—very wise."

"Don't flatter yourself. I mean to leave you to-day."

"Oh, surely not. Will it be for good?"

"Do you think I am going to live with a man little less than a wife-beater?"

"I didn't know you had any private income."

"I shall go home again."

"I don't somehow think you will."

"Do you imagine that your threats will prevent me?"

"Well, my dear, your father is indebted to me for a few thousands, and has been for some considerable time. If he allows you to remain in his house against your husband's wishes I will—ah, request an immediate settlement—and I know he hasn't got it, and matters might become strained. Think the matter over, my lady, but don't do anything rash."

When Dale returned in the afternoon he was surprised to find that his wife had gone to Cadogan Place, and at once jumped to the conclusion that she had left him for good; whereas Lady Isobel had merely gone to see her father to verify Dale's statement regarding the loan and to ask his advice.

All the pent-up venom and passion in Dale's nature appeared to suddenly spring into life, and instead of the calm, sneering, calculating man of the world, he was changed to a fiend incarnate. His features were distorted to ghastliness, and the violent fit of coughing that now and again attacked him with terrible violence only added to his awful appearance. James, the butler, when summoned, stared horror-stricken at his master.

"James, have my things packed for a year's foreign tour, and send them to Charing Cross Station."

"To-day, sir?"

"Yes, at once, and I want you to pay all the servants off and shut up the house as quickly as you can. If Lady Isobel returns she is not to enter this house on any pretext, do you understand?"

"Ye—es, sir."

"Have her clothes and things sent to Cadogan Place."

"I believe this is her ladyship coming in now, sir."

"Yes, go and obey the other orders."

"You have changed your mind too late, my lady; you can return to your father's house, no one wants you here."

"Edwin! Whatever do you mean?"

"Neither more nor less than what I said. In an hour's time this house will be shut up, so if you want any of your effects you had better see after them."

"Edwin, dear, you are not well. Oh, surely you don't mean this just because of the few words we had this morning. Edwin, speak to me!"

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"It's too late, I tell you; my mind is made up."

"Oh, Edwin, darling, forgive me; I didn't mean to vex you like this."

"Get out of my way. I am going."

"No, no. I cannot let you go like this. Edwin, my love, my husband, forgive me."

She stood facing him, with her arms pleadingly extended, and as he made a stride forward, she flung herself against him, crying and imploring him not to leave her. He tried to disengage himself from the nervous arms that were round him, but they held him with the strength of despair. Losing every atom of control of himself he flung her violently from him, and Lady Isobel fell with a crash against the marble fireguard, her head striking the outer rail with a horrible thud—she was dead.

Dale left the house a different man—he hadn't the remotest idea that he had killed his wife. The evil passions deserted him as quickly as they had risen, and he felt almost inclined to go back and make it up with Isobel; and possibly might have returned on that errand, but for one reason. He didn't love her, and had never done since his marriage, which, in fact, was only a means to attain an end.

"It is always well," Dale mused as he walked towards Cambridge Mansions, "to keep one good card in reserve, if only to gain the lead. Yes, I will play mine now, and when it scores, as it is sure to, Jessie and I will leave this miserable climate and go somewhere where there is warmth and sunshine."

"Miss Caister said she would be back by six, did she? Ah, then, I will wait, it is nearly that now."

A bright red fire gave not only actual heat to the room, but reflected a warm glow on the surroundings, and as Dale sat watching the ever-changing pictures in the grate, his thoughts gradually released from their continual strain, ran riot for a while, but the warmth and soothing influence soon impelled reflections of that last visit, and everything that occurred, even to his dream, was vividly depicted in his mind. The reverie was interrupted by the sound of voices and footsteps approaching, and Dale turned to see who it was just as Jessie and Sir John Farren entered the room.

"How do you do, Jessie? How are you, Jack?

"What's the matter? Can't you speak?" as Jessie and Sir John drew back.

"Yes, Dale, kindly drop Christian names for the future. In fact, I think we had better drop acquaintanceship altogether. My wife and I don't——"

"Your what?" meaningly.

"My wife, sir," taking Jessie's hand.

Dale sank into a chair; he tried to articulate something, but the red stream of life choked his utterance, save a sickening gurgle; he had burst an artery.

When Sir John returned to Cambridge Mansions, after taking his wife to a neighbouring hotel, two men accosted him.

"Excuse me, Sir John," said one. "Is Mr. Edwin Dale upstairs?"

"He was; why do you ask?"

"We're two police officers, and we have warrants for his arrest for forgery and murder. Do you know where he is, sir?"

"Heaven knows that; he is dead." **C. E. Cowan.**

£50 FROM ONE READER TO THE REST.

A reader of SHORT STORIES won a prize of £10 in 1894 and with the help of this money emigrated to America making a fortune out of the cycle boom of 1897 and 1898. He recently wrote a letter, under the *nom-de-plume* of "Dayton," to the Editor of SHORT STORIES, inclosing dollar bills to the value of £50, and asking that this money may be offered as prizes in five sums of £10 each.

The Editor has given the matter very careful consideration, and has arrived at the conclusion that, as his anonymous correspondent was in great want when he won his prize, the most satisfactory manner of distributing his gifts of £50 would be to offer them to those who can give the best reasons for receiving them.

You may be wanting to emigrate to one of our Colonies. You may want £10 to buy something you have needed for a long time. You may want to clear off some small debts that have been worrying you. Or you may want to trade with the £10 and, like "Dayton," turn it into a fortune.

Whatever your reason for wanting it may be, write it down in the space below, and send it to "The Competition Editor of SHORT STORIES," Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "Dayton 4," by Tuesday, January 20th.

Readers may send as many reasons as they like, provided each is written on a separate coupon. Another coupon will appear next week. The Editor's decision is final, and competitors may enter only on this understanding.

CUT OFF THE COUPON HERE.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ. A celebrated French artist in love with Belinda.

PAUL DE SONNAZ. A young French nobleman and friend of Lady Peggy.

BARON ROLLA. An extremely wealthy Parisian, in love with Belinda.

The House in the Rue Burgoyne.

Of the scene that followed I find it difficult to give an adequate description. The whole vast mass of spectators rushed pell-mell to the spot where Adams, who had been lifted from the horse, was lying. Loud and violently excited voices filled the air with shouts, one faction contending that Adams, having failed to ride the horse, the race, so far as Maraschino was concerned, was void; the other as vehemently asserting that, having secured first place, the horse must be held to have won. And in the midst, unconscious of the loud voices, the flushed and angry faces, the din and clamour of the crowd, the young jockey lay, unmindful of it all.

Stanley had hurried to his side, and, resting the lad's head on his knee, was trying to force some brandy through the fast-closed lips. Somebody called, another fetched a doctor, there was a moment's pause—a pause in which the violent clamour died away, and then in a quiet voice the doctor gave his verdict.

"He is dead," he said slowly. "The cause?" he shrugged his shoulders. "Heart affected, I should say, but we shall tell better later."

"I say the man was drugged," cried Stanley, starting to his feet, "drugged, and by *you!*" and, like a flash, he sprang at Eastacres, striking him in the face. The next instant he was surrounded and dragged back. The Duke, pale as death, save for the livid mark upon his cheek, retained his self-control, and listened quietly to the regrets and apologies of the stewards of the race for Forbes' unprovoked attack.

"Mr. Forbes is suffering from great excitement," he said calmly. "He has had much trouble of late—domestic and otherwise. He has dropped a good deal of money over the race, I fancy."

Then, with a sneer at Forbes, he turned away, murmuring a few words in my ear as he passed. I nodded in reply, and signed to Baron Rolla to approach me.

"Where is Belinda?" I asked.

"My dear lady," he returned, "I was about to ask you the same question. I left Miss North at her own request to find out what was happening to that poor young fellow, Adams; when I returned she had vanished, gone, no trace of her to be seen."

"She may, perhaps, have left the course, and be waiting for us in your motor, Baron."

"I have already looked there, but in vain."

"What can have happened?" I asked in agitation.

The Baron smiled.

"Nothing for which you need feel concerned, I am sure," he said. "Miss North is an adventurous young lady, possibly we shall find her exploring the stables, or——" he paused, "she may have come after me to inquire for herself into Adams' condition. I will go and find out."

As he spoke he hurried off, and, a moment later, was in close conversation with Stanley, who, quieter now, and more like himself, was ready to answer the Baron's questions.

The latter returned, looking rather troubled.

"No," he said slowly, "Forbes cannot help us at all. He suggests," the Baron frowned as he spoke, "he suggests that the Duke of Eastacres may have driven her home. Is it likely, do you think?"

"Not for an instant. Eastacres has only this moment left the course."

"Then," said Rolla dubiously, "I don't know what to do. I have questioned the officials closely, and no one remembers to have seen her. She is certainly not here," he glanced at the rapidly thinning crowd.

"We had better go at once to the Hotel D'Auteuil," I said. "Belinda is quite likely to have started off by herself. In all probability she took a fancy for a ride on a tramcar. She's a dreadful responsibility, Baron; one never knows what she will do next."

"A responsibility I should be more than thankful to accept," he said, flushing.

I shook my head.

"I'm afraid it is no good for me to raise false hopes, Baron," I said with a sigh. "There's only one man who has any chance of winning Belinda, and that's the Duke."

"*The Duke!*" Rolla gave me a quick, curious glance from his keen black eyes. "Incredible," he said, astonished out of his self-control, "Miss North has told me over and over again that she disliked——" He paused, bit his lip, angered at his lack of reticence.

"Oh, as to that," I returned lightly, "young girls often affect dislike for a man when, in reality, they feel very differ-

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ently. Take my word for it, Baron, Belinda will marry Eastacres yet."

He looked politely incredulous, and escorted me to his automobile. We arrived at the house of my friend the Marquise in a few minutes, to find that Belinda had not yet returned.

The Baron seemed surprised, almost, I thought, alarmed. I was amused at his anxiety, amused though a little apprehensive.

My apprehension increased when Paul de Sonnaz joined with Rolla in declaring that a vigorous search should be instituted for Belinda.

"Who does she know in Paris besides ourselves and the rest of our set, Lady Peggy?" questioned Paul.

"There is Mrs. Murchison-Lee," I suggested, "she is putting up at the Nord, I believe. Belinda may be there, or——" I paused, "she may have gone to Mrs. Forbes. She's rather fond of Sheila."

"We will go to both places," said Rolla, and Paul eagerly fell in with the suggestion.

I had no option but to accompany them. Paris was full, and the streets crowded, but we went at a good round pace, and, regardless of the cries of the unfortunate *cochers* and enraged pedestrians, whirled round to the Nord and on to Sheila's. The latter was out, also Midge; at neither place had Belinda been seen.

"We will return to my aunt's," said Paul quietly. "If she is not there"—he paused, his boyish face turned pale, and a look of resolution tightened his mouth.

Meanwhile, for all my calmness and my self-possession, I was undergoing a purgatory of doubt and fear.

I knew where Belinda was—had known it all along. At that moment she was in a house in the Rue Burgoyne, the house where Honoria and Mark Striven lived, the very house to which Honoria had warned her never to come.

A verbal message had reached Belinda, presumably from her weak-minded ladyship, begging and praying the girl to come to the Rue Burgoyne at once, as Honoria was in great trouble and distress. Those who have read my previous articles do not need me to tell them the effect of this appeal on my charge. Then and there she rushed off without a word to me, without a look at Rolla, filled with pity for her friend and indignation against those who were troubling her.

A fiacre was waiting into which Belinda stepped with unsuspecting readiness, and was driven away to the house in the Rue Burgoyne.

In that house the Duke of Eastacres was to play his last most desperate card, to force her into marriage.

It was now close on seven o'clock. I had hoped that Belinda's absence would be unremarked until much later. If I felt uneasy before, judge of my state of mind when, with a sudden inspiration, Paul rose to his feet and shouted to the Baron to alter his course.

"I know where she is!" he exclaimed. "Ten thousand to one Belinda's gone to see Eastacres' sister. She told me about her only yesterday, how unhappy the poor creature was and what a brute the Duke had been to her. What do you say, Lady Peggy, isn't it possible she may be there?"

For a moment I could not speak, my heart throbbed so violently that the agony was most acute. Gasping, I put up my hand.

"She's not likely to be there," I said, and then, white with pain and agitation, I fell back in my seat with a faint request for air.

I really felt very ill, and the concern the two men displayed was genuinely excited. All the same, I took advantage of the attack to gain time. It was quite an hour before I felt sufficiently recovered to leave the café where Paul had brought me.

During that hour I had contrived to send a word of warning to the Duke. Whether or no my message would have the desired effect, I could not say. I could only hope and pray for its success.

"And now," said Rolla, when at last I was able to take my seat in the car, "what are we going to do?"

"Go as quickly as possible to the Rue Burgoyne," said Paul. "Belinda has not returned home. If she is not at Honoria's I shall begin to be alarmed."

Without further question or delay we started. It was a long drive to the house, which lay outside Paris, some few miles from the town, and the sun had set when at last we reached our destination. The house stood by itself, in a large garden thickly planted with trees. It was gloomy and deserted in the extreme, the windows were all shuttered, and the garden gate was barred; the whole place spelt desolation, not a sign or sound of life about it!

There was no bell or knocker at the gate, so, after a little demur, Rolla forced it open and led the way up the moss-grown path to the house door. Here we waited for some ten minutes, pulling an old and rusty bell handle at intervals, or knocking loudly on the panels of the door.

At last an answer came. An old woman, rather dirty and stone deaf, appeared, and told us that the family were away!

She paid no heed to Paul's impatient questions, but repeated the formula with a queer shake of the head, until in despair he gave up trying to communicate with her, and flung off down the garden path. Rolla followed more slowly, while I, for reasons of my own, continued to loiter some distance behind them both, and gazed intently at the upper windows of the house. At length I was rewarded by the appearance of the signal upon which the Duke and I had agreed. The shutters of the attic window were unbarred, and from the open casement streamed a handkerchief. For one second only it fluttered in the breeze, but in that second the world seemed changed. It told me that Belinda was in the house and that things were shaping as the Duke and I desired, that I was so much nearer £20,000.

An immense weight was taken from my mind. I rejoined my two companions with a feeling of triumph, almost exultation.

"What next?" said Paul anxiously. "Shall we not communicate with the police? It is after nine, and one shudders to think of Belinda robbed, ill-treated, perhaps." He paused, and in the faint light of the May evening I saw his face was very pale.

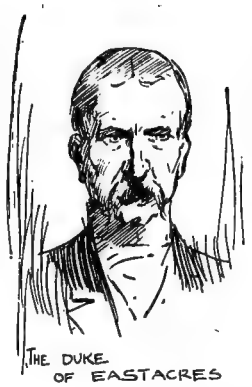
"We will not go to the police," I said firmly, "neither will we make any further inquiries of a public nature. Whatever is done now must be carried out with the greatest discretion."

He looked puzzled, and showed signs of making protest.

"You at least should understand my reason," I said severely. "Belinda is a young, a high-spirited, hot-tempered girl, ready to throw conventionality and custom to the wind—ready, if needs be, to risk her whole future for the sake of an impulse. You know this as well as I. You realised to the full the girl's generous, guileless, but most thoughtless disposition. Yet you encouraged her in every imprudence, assisted her in every whim. And now"—I threw out my hands indignantly—"what is the result? Belinda is missing, gone where and to whom? Ah, you have much to answer for, De Sonnaz. As I live, I fear Belinda has left her friends, abandoned her future, disobeyed her father, and run away with David Carr."

"Impossible!" said Paul.

"It is easy to say that now," I retorted. "You evidently thought otherwise when you encouraged her to speak of him, calling yourself his friend and a lot of other rubbish. A nice friend you've been to Belinda, at all events. Oh, don't excuse yourself," as he broke out into protestations of innocence and regret, "the thing's done, the mistake's been made. What we have to do now is to avoid all scandal and bring her quickly back to the Hotel D'Auteuil. You, Baron," I turned to Rolla, "must go to the British Embassy and find out if Carr has been or is likely to go there to arrange for his marriage


THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

with Belinda. Paul must return to the Marquise and narrate a colourable story as to Belinda's and my absence. For myself," I paused, "I intend to find my charge."

The Baron murmured his admiration of my intrepidity, and readily agreed to play the part assigned to him. Paul was not so easily disposed of.

"You are wrong, Lady Peggy," he said firmly. "Belinda gave her word she would not see or speak to Mr. Carr without your knowledge. I will swear she has not broken her word."

"Where is she, then?" I asked impatiently. "You waste time, precious time in useless discussion. Believe me or not, as you will, but do not hinder me. I must go."

With a nod to the two men I hastened off, past the house in the Rue Burgoyne, out towards the open country. Rolla and De Sonnaz gathered that I possessed certain knowledge of the girl's whereabouts that I did not wish to share with them, and did not attempt to follow or to question me. A few minutes later, to my intense relief, I heard the sound of the automobile travelling swiftly towards the city.

I took a deep, hard breath. The strain of the last few hours had been severe; that which was to follow would be even greater. I shrank back at the prospect. I was almost tempted to return to the Hotel D'Auteuil and leave matters—and Belinda—to chance.

I should have a few hours' rest and quiet, and to-morrow—with a sigh I dismissed the pleasant prospect. No rest, no quiet for me till the marriage of Belinda to the Duke was an accomplished fact.

I waited another hour, and then, when the clocks from the neighbouring churches chimed half-past ten, I retraced my steps, entered the old iron gate, traversed the weed-grown path, and stood once more before the portals of the house in the Rue Burgoyne.

All was silent and still therein. I had half expected to hear angry voices, Belinda's and the Duke's. I had dreaded the former's cries of distress. The strange, the deathly stillness of the place quickened my sense of fear. What if the Duke had played me false, what if Belinda were not in this grim house? What——?

I all but cried out in my alarm, and eagerly sought to find a way by which I could enter the house without the knowledge of those within. The front door was fast locked, so also the small door at the back. The windows, still barred and shuttered, afforded me no chance of ingress. I was in despair, and had almost resolved to formally demand admittance, when the flash of a lamp in a window in the side of the house from a room on the first floor caught my eyes. Immediately, following the train of thought suggested, my glance fell upon a block of outhouses, disused stables, and wood-sheds, which, though fallen on evil days, were in a better state of preservation than the rest of the property. Moreover, and this had first attracted me, they were built so close to the house that there was but the distance of a few feet between them. And from the window of the room above the stable one could look straight into the window of the room from where the lamp had shone. The room, where, unless I had been shamefully deceived, Belinda and the Duke were now quarrelling.

I formed my resolution quickly, and acted upon it then and there. Five minutes later found me leaning from the window of the stable, listening intently to what was happening in that room so short a space away.

It was an ideal position. I could see all, hear all that passed, my presence being unsuspected.

The room was lit by a small hand-lamp, placed on a table near the window. Bending towards each other, so that the flicker of the flame lit up their faces, were two figures—Belinda and the Duke!

"Where is Honoria?" she cried, "and by whose orders have I been kept in this place, this wretched room, for hours? I came here in response to an appeal for help from your unhappy sister, and when I came——" she paused, "you know what happened," she cried angrily. "I see it in your face—mean, treacherous, false——"

He stopped her with a gesture.

"You were brought into this room," he said calmly, "and the door—a thick, stout door, was locked on you. All that has happened to you since you left the racecourse this afternoon was pre-arranged. By whom, you ask? Can you not guess—it was your most devoted slave," and he bowed in a mocking fashion, pressing his hand to his heart.

"And Honoria?" The girl's face had grown white; she glanced half fearfully over her shoulder towards the door. "Where is she?"

"Honoria, to the best of my belief, is with her husband at the Hotel du Nord. They have gone to see your friend, Mrs. Murchison-Lee."

"Then—then—I am here alone with you?" The words were forced from her white lips; she trembled, and grasped the table for support.

"Alone with me," he replied softly.

She turned upon him swiftly, suddenly, all traces of weakness gone, her eyes flashing, the red blood mounting to her cheeks.

"What do you want?" she said fiercely.

"That is a simple thing to answer. Listen, and you will comprehend exactly how the matter stands. We are here, you and I, in a lonely house some distance out of Paris. You will stay here until to-morrow. And then," he smiled—"then if you wish you shall return to the house of the Marquise D'Arteuil. And do you know what will happen then? The Marquise will refuse to receive you. Society will be closed against you."

"What then?" Belinda asked, with scorn equal to his own. "My friends will believe no ill of me. My enemies can say what they like. It will not trouble me."

"Your friends will not be able to believe you. This"—he drew out a note—"this will testify to the truth of what I say, that you came here to meet me by appointment, an appointment made by yourself. Ah! you may well turn pale. Did you think to outwit *me*? Look"—he thrust the letter in her face—"your writing, your words, your signature. 'Come, come this evening, ten o'clock in the Rue Burgoyne.—*Belinda*' Yes," as she gave a quick and startled cry, "yes, it is true. You sent me the note, and I, I am here."

He stepped towards her, and took her arms roughly.

With a cry she broke from him, and flung herself against the door. It would not yield despite her strength; the panels did not give an inch. Eastacres waited till the fury of her onslaught had abated. Then he drew near her.

"Sit down," he said, "and let us talk the matter out. It will not help you to make all this noise, no one can hear; be reasonable and listen to what I have to say."

"I will not marry you," she said, "and if I promised to-night, I should break my word to-morrow."

"You will promise for to-night, for to-morrow and for always," he said persistently. "If not, at the first sign that you intend to go back upon your word, I send this note and the account of the circumstances that preceded it, to your father, to David Carr, and to the principal papers in London and Paris. Do you think your David will believe in you then?" he sneered.

"He will always believe in me," she answered, "nothing could shake his trust in me." At the thought of the young engineer her eyes grew soft, the beautiful mouth trembled. I was sorry for her at that moment, truly sorry. But I was none the less determined that she should not marry Carr.

"Men are not credulous as you suppose," Eastacres answered. "Consider the facts. You leave the racecourse without a word to your friends, without a hint to anyone, and drive here in a hired cab. You do this on the very day that Honoria wrote to say she was calling on you at the Hotel D'Arteuil as soon as she left Mrs. Murchison-Lee's. You had that letter?" "I thought so," and he smiled malevolently.

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"I forgot it," Belinda answered, "as I forgot everything when I had Honoria's message begging and praying me to come here."

"Where is that message?" said Eastacres grimly.

"It was brought me by a boy. He said he was employed here to——" she paused, frightened at the look on Eastacres' face.

"There is no boy employed here," he said curtly. "Honoria and Mark have but one servant, an old woman."

"Then, then"—she paused—"it is all a trick," she panted, "a vile, horrible trick. What shall I do?" She glanced round wildly. "David, David," she cried, "what shall I do?"

"Face facts, my dear Belinda," said the Duke, "and acknowledge yourself beaten. To-night I ask you to be my wife. After to-night"—he paused significantly—"you, not I, shall be the one to plead. Refuse me, and I will make your life unbearable. Everywhere I will follow you, everywhere you shall find averted faces. Your friends shall one and all turn from you. This David that you talk of, you shall lose even him."

"Never," she said proudly; "come what may, David will stand by me."

"To his undoing," was the reply; "what chance would he have of rising in the world with a wife like you? A woman of whom scandal told a thousand tales. You yourself would refuse to marry him."

He spoke quickly, coldly, without a touch of heat or passion, but his words carried a terrible conviction. Belinda had been long enough in Society to understand that much of what he threatened could be done. The Duke was strong-willed, persistent, untiring. He would work out his purpose to the end, no matter at what cost. For the first time terror, real and tangible, showed in the girl's face. She was very young, very lovely, and life had been pleasant to her. She could not face the thought of coldness, suspicion, such as Eastacres pictured, unmoved. Something of the world's cruelty—our world's—she had seen meted out to Sheila Forbes on her re-entry into Society. But Belinda was threatened with something far worse to bear. No wonder she faltered, no wonder that even her high spirit quailed. David, her rock of strength, her shelter from all harm, even he would turn from her, or rather she must, dare not appeal to him.

With natural quickness, the Duke realised what was passing in her mind. With a sudden change of manner he drew close to her, and in a voice exquisitely modulated besought her to yield.

"Be my wife," he pleaded. "Don't harden your heart against me. I love you with all the strength, the passion of a man who has known and tasted life and love. Dear one," he clasped her hands, "don't refuse me. You shall not regret your choice. I vow it, I swear it. I lay my heart at your feet. I put my life into your hands. Dearest"—he kissed her fingers eagerly, "dearest, will you not listen to me."

With a gesture of contempt she tore her hand from his grasp, and with all the insolence of youth and inexperience laughed—*laughed* in his face.

"Love," she said scornfully, "coming from your lips! The word is defiled. You don't know the meaning of it. *Love!*"—she threw back her head—"Oh, how I scorn and how I hate you," she said fiercely. "Do what you will, slander me if you can, spread your lies broadcast, still I defy you—still I reject you, and will, unto the last."

Her words, her look, swept from him all gentleness, all tenderness towards her. His face hardened, his eyes glittered, cold, cutting as ice. He paled to a deathly whiteness, and with a swift and sudden gesture he advanced towards her.

"Now," he said, "for the last time, will you be my wife?"

"Never," she answered, "never. You shall kill me first."

A strange look came into the Duke's face, the look that gleams from a man's eyes when for a moment the fierce primitive instinct, the desire to kill, beats down the thousand civilising influences that war against it. I held my breath, wondering what would happen next. Would he kill her? Would he, in his fury, crush out that fair young life rather than let her marry David Carr?

[*This question will be answered in next Tuesday's issue.*]

Your Editor Chats.

I don't pretend—no editor does—to be able to please everybody, but I am certainly surprised that H. M. L. should have felt justified in writing me a very long letter, proving to his own satisfaction that *Short Stories* is not worth the penny asked for it. He starts with the cover and points out that the coloured pictures on it are not nearly so attractive as the old plain buff cover in which it used to be wrapped. Next, he takes the serial story, which he regards as "devoid of human interest," and regards Brett as "a conceited idiot." The "Belinda" series next comes under his knife, and these articles he politely terms "balderdash," adding that, from his knowledge of the world, such things as are related never take place in High Society. There is much more of this sort of thing, ending up with the remark that the least interesting portion of the whole paper is that "egotistical column of self-glorification known as 'Your Editor Chats.'"

Of course I don't take this sort of letter seriously, but I give you extracts to show you how really funny some people unconsciously are. The best test of the popularity of any publication is the circulation book, and the fact that the circulation of *Short Stories* has during the past year almost doubled itself, is sufficient refutation of the ridiculous criticisms my correspondent makes.

Moreover, I have received hundreds—several hundreds—of letters from readers within the past few week testifying to the excellence of both "Belinda" and the serial story. All these letters have been spontaneous expressions of their writers' feelings and go to show that H. M. L. is alone in thoughts. His knowledge of life in High Society is certainly not wide, or he would have known that every line of "Belinda" was absolutely true. Those things which seem most incredible are the most interesting. If they were not, I shouldn't trouble to publish the series.

Another powerful new serial will start in a few weeks from the pen of one of your favourite authors.

Scotch readers will be pleased to hear that another Tartan cover will be issued with *Short Stories* dated February 14th. The Tartan will be that of the Clergy.

Your Editor.

Result of the "Burglar" Competition.

The Gramophone prizes have been awarded to:

P. Hart, "The Hollies," Vicarage Road, Waddon.
S. A. G. Macquoid, 32 South Street, Greenock.
W. B. Good, 22 Cambridge Road, King's Heath, Birmingham.
Mrs. M. Matthews, 12 Jacob Street, Toxteth Park, Liverpool.
E. Moore, 285 Borough Road, Birkenhead.
E. Barker, 129 Queen's Parade, Scarborough.
Mrs. E. M. French, 194 Birkbeck Road, Beckenham.
D. Ryan, 11 Upper Elmwood Avenue, Ranelagh, Dublin.
L. Judd, St. Monica, Whitton Road, Twickenham.
S. Bryant, 18 Llautwit Street, Cathays, Cardiff.

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Love Problem No. 5.

WAS HE . . JUSTIFIED?

How Should a Man Act when in Love with an Engaged Girl?

THERE must have been something more than coincidence in it. Every morning as the 'bus swung round the corner of Majoram Street, it had to wait a minute or two owing to the street being so crowded.

The first time Jack Sutcliffe noticed it from his seat beside the driver was one morning in September. When the 'bus jolted clumsily to a standstill he glanced up from his paper and found himself gazing straight at the most comfortable little breakfast party he had seen for some time.

There were only three people—father, mother and daughter. At the first two he glanced carelessly, but as soon as his eye rested upon the girl, his heart was gone in a moment. Such a bit of a girl as she was, with the most ridiculous untidy curls you ever saw, and a little nose you could have ruled lines with, it was so straight. And then her mouth, why, you couldn't have measured it to save your life, for first it dimpled into a smile at one end and then drooped at the other, and the next moment opened into the merriest little laugh you ever heard. Not that Jack Sutcliffe could hear it, although he soon began to wish he could.

Next morning the 'bus stopped again at exactly the same corner. He glanced eagerly towards the window and saw the same three persons seated as before at the breakfast table. But this time he looked beyond the elderly people and bestowed his attention entirely upon the girl, finding her more bewitching than before; and when the 'bus presently rumbled forward again he turned in his seat so as to feast his eyes and his heart until the last possible moment.

He began to look forward to the morning ride, and when on one occasion the 'bus actually swung its way round the corner and down Majoram Street without stopping he was quite indignant with the driver; scarcely spoke to him until they reached his destination, and was irritable at business all the morning.

Of course this sort of indefinite adoration could not go on for ever, and as Jack was a practical man, he began to cast about for means to obtain an introduction. Here again Fate befriended him, or so he thought. The same lucky chance that had caused him to glance at the window just as the 'bus stopped, now led him to accept an invitation from a friend to a literary evening, when one of the first persons he saw was the very girl he had tried for several weeks to meet!

"How much is the subscription to this affair?" he whispered excitedly.

"For the session?"

"Yes. I want to join. Am I eligible?"

"Oh, yes. Five shillings."

"Right. I say, that's—that's not a bad-looking girl over there, the one with a pale blue top-dress, and a black skirt."

"Oh, Miss Mellor?" His friend laughed slightly. "Curious you should have noticed that identical girl. Do you know, I'm engaged to her, or practically so. Not settled in so many words, but it's quite understood on both sides."

"Oh—yes—yes, of course."

The next moment he found himself standing opposite to the corkscrew curls and the dimpled mouth, and all the other perfections. Then his friend said something—he knew not what—and she smiled in such a maddening way that poor Jack found himself wondering what would happen if he suddenly seized her in his arms and kissed her. But the next moment he realised that his friend was staring at him in surprise and he bowed confusedly.

"Very pleased indeed," he murmured; "the 'bus stops every morning, you know."

After this, seeing their looks of amazement, he pulled himself together and managed to talk sensibly. But all through the evening he paid very little attention to the literary proceedings. Several times when she happened to turn her head she found his eyes fixed upon her, with an earnestness which indeed was one of Jack's best characteristics.

Such an evident case of love at first sight both flattered and alarmed her. It set her thinking too, and girls of twenty think quickly, almost as quickly as boys of twenty. We may as well admit at once that she was not by any means engaged to Jack's friend, although he undoubtedly was first favourite.

Of course Jack had no idea she had so quickly guessed the state of his feelings, and indeed would have been very sorry had he known it; for he was an honourable fellow and had no idea of endeavouring to supplant his friend.

But one thing he could not help noticing afterwards, and it hurt him quite as much as having his hopes dashed at the moment when success was in sight. His friend, although by his own statement, engaged to be married, or practically so, still continued to spend his spare evenings in what he vaguely termed "knocking about town."

Now Jack never accompanied him on these expeditions, for he had very soon severed his connection with the worshippers of Bacchus, but he lodged in the same house as his friend and could not help noticing that frequently when the latter returned home his footsteps were decidedly unsteady. On more than one occasion he was brought home in a cab and Jack was called downstairs to help him to his room.

So long as Fred Winston was single and with nobody's happiness dependent upon him, Jack held, and rightly, that this conduct was entirely a matter for his own consideration. But his engagement to Miss Mellor—which was presently announced—made the case much more serious, especially as he appeared to make no effort to keep straight. In fact, he was, if anything, worse than before, for the restraint necessary when he visited the house in Majoram Street made him abandon all self-control as soon as he was free.

A very awkward question rose in Jack's mind. None of the Mellors had any idea of the double life led by Winston. Probably the knowledge of this would end the engagement at once. Jack had an uneasy feeling that it was his duty to tell them, although the mere thought of becoming a tale-bearer, and with interested motives, as people would say, was most repugnant to him; and probably Miss Mellor would never speak to him again whilst loving Winston all the more.

Besides, Winston might reform either before or when he married. On the other hand if he did not do so, his wife's life would be a tragedy. But there were thousands of women with drunken husbands—that did not affect the present case. But it was not his business to interfere—it is every man's business to save his friends when they are in danger. But what right had he to judge Winston? he was not going to judge him, but to bring the truth to light and leave it to those whom it concerned to decide.

And so on for half an hour until at last all the doubts and difficulties had been swept away and he stood face to face with his duty.

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That night when Winston arrived home he tackled him fair and square.

"I've something rather unpleasant to say to you, old man," he said; "but it's got to be done."

"Well?"

"It's this," said Jack steadily; "you're going to be married. Miss Mellor is a girl who's been very tenderly brought up, and if you come home to her in this state——"

"Well, what if I do?"

"You'll break her heart, that's all," said Jack earnestly. "Don't you see, old chap, it's no use thinking you'll change after you're married. If you don't stop now, you never will stop while you live."

"Will you mind your own business?"

"I'm sorry, but——"

"Never mind being sorry, keep yourself out of my business, that's all."

"I had rather the duty had fallen to anybody else, Fred, but I shall have to tell them next time."

"You may tell them now if you like, you sneak, I can easily explain your motives to them afterwards."

"If it means losing Miss Mellor's good opinion," said Jack quietly, though his heart sank at the thought; "and that's the most serious part of the affair to me, I'll still do what I say."

But the other man stumbled out of the room, uttering all sorts of threats against his former friend.

TWO WEEKS LATER.

MISS MELLOR sat beside the drawing-room fire with an open letter in her hand. Her eyes were red and swollen and the little curls were rumpled and tossed about more untidily than ever. Since receiving Jack's Sutcliffe letter—the writing of which had troubled him, poor fellow, quite as much as the reading troubled her—she had made careful inquiries about the life led by Fred Winston.

For she was a very earnest little champion of those whom she loved, and she was fully resolved to prove Jack's statements false and then crush him for once and all. She had asked him to call to-day—he was due now—but alas, the statements he had made were only too true!

"Not that I shall be any nicer to him on that account," she said to herself, shaking her dainty little head till the curls almost rattled; "I shall be just as nasty as I possibly can, because I quite understand why he wished to get rid——"

The door opened and Jack Sutcliffe walked in. His face was very pale, for he knew the reception he might expect from this imperious, warm-hearted little partisan. The interview was certainly short, and that was all the better.

"I asked you to call, Mr. Sutcliffe," she said, speaking unsteadily at first; "because I wished to tell you personally that your statements about—about Mr. Winston—were quite untrue and—and awfully mean."

"I wish they were untrue," said Jack miserably.

"But they are all true," she continued, her lip quivering; "and our engagement has been ended. Probably that was your desire," she added, with a sudden rush of bitterness, and then looked up to see if her words had hurt him.

He said nothing, for what could he say? It was not the moment in which to justify himself; but, of course, she misunderstood his silence and flung a last taunt as he rose to go.

"I want you to know," she said, "that I understand your reasons for trying to break off my engagement with Mr. Winston; but if you had been really fond of me," she added, with an effort; "you would not have tried to break my heart and—and ruin my happiness."

And with that she fled from the room, for the tears were struggling to the surface.

Jack found his way to the front door alone.

TWO YEARS LATER.

DEAR MR. SUTCLIFFE.—*I hear you are giving a paper at our literary society on "Elizabethan London." Father has an old book on this very subject if you care to borrow it. I shall be at home to-morrow evening if you will call, and shall be very glad to see you, as I have something else to explain, yours faithfully,*

EILEEN MELLOR.

Jack read this letter just before his breakfast one morning nearly two years after the events just related. He read it through carefully about half a dozen times—he is a poor man who never passes through this stage of life—and then propped it against the coffee pot and stared at it all the time he was eating his breakfast.

Surely it was the most wonderful letter that had ever been written! Such a beautiful undercurrent of friendliness ran through all the words, as though Cupid had pinned them together with one of his famous arrows! Such a thoughtful consideration for his success in giving the paper before the society! And then the delicate hint at the end, why, she meant to take back her unjust suspicions of course. As though it were necessary! And yet—it would be pleasant to hear her withdraw those cruel words—oh, if only he were free to say what he really thought of her, but he was not free—and besides, her friendliness would certainly not extend so far——

He had a firm conviction that their interview, two years ago, formed an insuperable barrier to prevent him from ever speaking to her on a subject dearer than ever since prohibited. He could never propose to her, no matter how free she might be, for the first words he spoke would rouse her suspicions of his motives. Though she withdrew her words twenty times over, it could not set him free to say what he wished. There was only one element of satisfaction in the whole business—that Fred had been persuaded to go to an uncle in Canada where he was doing famously and—as he admitted in a letter to Jack—was already engaged again.

Jack went round to the house in Majoram Street the following evening, and was shown into the same room as before. Next moment the door was opened again and she entered. Jack spoke first to remove the confusion that was painfully evident in her face.

"I am much obliged to you for the offer of the book."

"Yes," she answered quickly, "and I want to—to say how sorry I am for the unjust words I used when we last met. It was a very hard duty for you and——"

"Don't say another word," said Jack quietly, "this acknowledgment of my motives pays for all."

"Your motives were as true as they could be. I'm quite sure now that you only spoke because—because——"

"I can never explain the reason now," said Jack sadly.

"You had a reason?" she murmured, and came and stood closer to him and presently sat beside him on the sofa. "You had a reason?"

"I had indeed."

"And I suppose it really was a—a good reason?" she continued, stooping to pick a stray thread of white cotton from the floor.

"The best reason I ever had for anything in my life," said Jack passionately.

"It must have been very—very interesting," she whispered, almost inaudibly. "Won't you tell me—what it was?"

* * * * *

"Dear me!" said Jack three hours later as he walked briskly down Majoram Street, "I've forgotten all about that book. I must call round to-morrow! **Wal Frank.**

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Love in the Ruins.

Telling Incidentally of a Sketch and an Accident.

Isabel de Lacy sat in solitary state in the beautiful old drawing-room of the Priory, furnished in mediæval style with its old Bayeux tapestries on the walls and the old carved oak furniture, black with the passing of centuries. Reclining on a low chair, she leant her head against a softly-tinted Liberty cushion, which showed off to advantage the mass of soft, silky, golden hair which wreathed her brows like a queenly diadem. A dainty work-basket was at her side, a book lay half open on her dress, but she neither sewed nor read just now, and seemed lost in thought.

She mused on the strange destiny which had left her, a mere girl, sole mistress of this beautiful old Norman Priory, one of the show places of England.

Hugo de Lacy, one of the Norman barons who had accompanied William the Conqueror over to England, had been given these broad lands in recognition of his deeds of valour in the king's service. He had built himself a castellated keep as was then so prevalent among the Norman noblemen, and had returned to France to wed the lovely Jeanne de Crétigny, who had plighted her troth to him ere he sailed with the Duke of Normandy to conquer England.

Alas! the fair Jeanne had grown weary of waiting for her lover, who tarried so on England's shores, and Hugo de Lacy returned only to find she had just been wed to Estienne, Sire de Morneville. The young baron challenged his more fortunate rival, killed him in single combat. He alighted from his charger, tore the mailed gauntlet from the dead man's hand, steeped it in his blood, and then made his way to the Chateau de Morneville. Boldly entering the presence of the lady of the castle, he walked straight up to her and struck her brutally in the face with the crimson-dyed gauntlet.

"Here, false jade! Your black-hearted treachery has caused the death of your husband, and the lover whom you foully betrayed has steeped his hands in blood; accursed of men, denounced by God as a murderer, he goes from you henceforth to expiate in the cloister the crime you have goaded him into committing."

Jeanne flung herself at his feet and implored of him to forget her baseness and marry her, since he had removed the only obstacle to their union.

Hugo's soul turned sick at the vileness of this woman whom once he had loved, he plunged his rapier in her heart, spurned her dead body from him, and fled to England, where the brilliant knight and warrior was seen no more, except under the monk's cowl.

He built and endowed the Priory de Lacy in the grounds adjoining the castle he had erected, when he hoped to bring back from France his beautiful bride. Several holy men gathered round him, and for several centuries the monks of St. Hugo were far famed all over England for their great piety and saintliness. The barony of de Lacy had gone to a younger brother of the luckless suitor, and some generations further the then baron de Lacy obtained from King Edward III. that the broad lands of De Lacy should once more revert to their original owners, and the friars were expelled from the Priory, while Percival de Lacy took up his abode in the old castellated keep built by Hugo.

The Priory had never again been used as a monastery, and had gradually fallen into decay; it was now a most picturesque ivy-covered ruin, standing in the grounds.

Poets delighted to describe it, painters to reproduce it on canvas. The place still bore the name of the Priory, but the family really resided in the restored and a good deal modernised original old keep. The last owner, Gerard de Lacy, had died very shortly after his wife, who had gone off in a decline, and their infant daughter Isabel had been left as sole heiress of this beautiful place.

She had been brought up by an uncle, and had resided little at the Priory, but a couple of months ago she had come of age, and had at once asserted her independence by shaking off the shackles of her uncle's guardianship, and, in spite of all remonstrances, had insisted on coming to take up her abode at the Priory, unchaperoned by any one, her sole companion besides the staff of servants being a school friend, Fanny Mainreed, an orphan like herself, but not so favoured by fortune, as she had next to no money, and was going out to be a governess when her former school chum, the great heiress Miss de Lacy, hearing of the straits she was driven to, had engaged her nominally as her companion.

Miss Mainreed, however, had soon found that her duties were a mere sinecure, and that she was really treated as a friend and sister. Isabel was in a pensive mood just then, her sprightly companion having gone to do some shopping in the village. Isabel scanned the long future lying before her in no very bright or hopeful way.

She had unfortunately formed the unreasonable notion that no man would love her for herself, but that if she ever married she would only fall a victim to a fortune-hunter; and she had firmly made up her mind never to wed. Only such a resolution to a girl of one-and-twenty is not very conducive to cheerfulness, and Isabel wondered what she would do all alone in the long years to come. Fanny, her chosen friend whom she dearly loved, would marry; she, lucky girl, was dowerless; and when men would seek her hand she would know it was for herself and not for her broad acres or her gold.

Her meditations were suddenly broken in upon by the entrance of Miss Mainreed, who came dancing into the room holding a tiny slip of cardboard in her hand.

"Oh, Bell, just look, here is something exciting to break the monotony of our dull lives!"

"Well, Fanny, what is it? I think it must be the near neighbourhood of the cloisters which depresses you!"

"Really, Bell, to tell you the truth, I cannot think why you do not fill this beautiful old place with a jolly house-party, and then we could have dances, tennis, ping-pong, badminton; it would be simply ripping. But just now, with only us two girls, it is a bit tame."

"What would Mrs. Grundy say to the two of us girls, as you say, entertaining a lot of people."

"Oh come, Bell, you know you do not care a rap for that respectable old viper-tongued matron, or else you would not have elected to live here just with me, and no staid old chaperon in a beribboned cap and spectacles to act propriety! So you need not pretend to be afraid of Mrs. Grundy."

"Well, no; as a matter of fact, I do not care a straw about her. But it is such a bore having to entertain people whom one feels no interest in; women who will envy me my dresses or my servants, men who will make love to me just because, as the French say, 'The pill is well gilt!'"

"Come now, Bell, none of that nonsense to me; as if any man would not love you for your beauty without ever thinking

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of that dross we call gold! But look here, I am keeping the poor fellow on tenter-hooks all this time."

"What poor fellow?" and Isabel looked up bewildered.

"A knight errant, my dear, who, having heard of the fame of your beauty, lies at your gates languishing for one pitying look from you!"

"Fanny, don't be a goose," Isabel remonstrated severely. "Do be sensible; what is that man you are alluding to?"

Fanny drew up her pretty rose-bud of a mouth into a bewitching pout.

"Oh, well, if I am to be snubbed every time I open my mouth, I shan't speak again, *never no more*, so there!"

Isabel reached out her hand, and twitched the card out of Fanny's fingers; she had been nervously twisting it into the shape of a curl paper. Isabel carefully smoothed out the creases, and flattened it on her knee, then she read what was on it—Harold Varly.

"Fanny," she said, pretending to be severe with her irrepressible young friend, "may I ask who is Mr. Harold Varly?"

"Oh, certainly you may ask!"

"Well, and *will* you answer?"

"Awfully sorry I cannot comply with your wishes, but the fact is I have not the very least idea of who or what Mr. Harold Varly is."

"Fan, you are a provoking minx!"

"Yes, that's very much the same sort of thing only differently worded which the curate told me this afternoon."

"Fan, Fan, I do believe you are flirting with that unfortunate young man."

"Well, I have nothing else to do, and you know 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.'"

"Seriously, Fanny, if you have no conception of who is Mr. Harold Varly, why on earth were you in possession of his visiting card?"

"Well, Bell, this time I shall be quite candid with you. Old Johnson met me in the hall, and handed me this card, saying a gentleman was at the lodge gates asking for permission to paint the ruins of the Priory."

"Oh!" said Isabel, "I wish my home were not a show place, not really belonging to me, but a sort of public property. Besides, the official day for visitors to see the Priory is Saturday and this is Monday. I think one day a week is quite enough to throw open my grounds to a herd of visitors."

"Well, then your answer is that Mr. Harold Varly may whistle for permission to paint the ruins. Poor fellow! I am sorry for him; perhaps his daub might have brought him in a few pounds, and the poor beggar may be terribly out at elbows. Bell, do let us see him at least before you give your final answer."

"Oh, as you like, if it pleases you." She rang the bell as she spoke.

"Tell the gentleman who has just sent in his card that Miss de Lacy will receive him."

The old butler bowed acquiescence to his mistress's orders, and promptly retired to do her bidding.

In a few minutes he returned, and throwing open the drawing-room door, admitted a tall, gentlemanly young fellow, who seemed not one whit abashed at the sumptuousness of the drawing-room to which he was admitted. He bowed, and advanced towards the two ladies.

"Miss de Lacy?" and he looked inquiringly at both.

"I am Miss de Lacy," Isabel said, acknowledging his bow by an almost imperceptible bending of the head, while Fanny smiled quite graciously at him.

"I have come to beg a favour at your hands, Miss de Lacy."

"Yes," was the chilling, unencouraging response; but he proceeded—

"The fame of your beautiful Priory ruins has spread all over England; my speciality in the painting line lies in reproducing old abbeys and castles, and I have travelled specially from London here to paint De Lacy Priory."

"Any guide-book would have told you that the day for visitors is Saturday."

"Yes, but I do not wish to go there on the visitors' day. I must, for at least a whole week, go to the Priory day after day if I wish to make a good picture of it."

"And you wish me for a whole week to forego the privacy and seclusion of my grounds?"

Mr. Varly looked surprised at the ungraciousness of the tones. Very good looking and highly cultured, he was mostly a favourite with ladies, and was not accustomed to be received with such scant courtesy at their hands.

"I do not think I would interfere very much with your privacy," and he added with a smile; "You must pay the penalty of being the owner of such a beautiful, historical place!"

"There is no *must* in the case." Isabel looked at him haughtily. What presumption of him to come and tell her she *must* do so and so.

"Oh, come, Bell, dearest; don't be so obdurate. I am sure Mr. Varly won't be in our way at all; will you now?"

The young artist smiled at this fair advocate who so unexpectedly backed up his request.

"Well, I shall try not."

"And, in fact, it will be rather fun to go down every day and see the picture. Oh, perhaps you won't want us to do that though, will you?"

"Only too pleased, I am sure," he quickly responded.

"And you will let us have a little pencil sketch of the Priory, will you?"

"Yes, certainly; but you seem to forget Miss de Lacy has not yet granted me permission to paint on her premises."

"Oh, Bell, Bell! it is Mr. Varly," cried Fanny. "He must have been killed by that old wall falling on him."

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Isabel smiled faintly.

"No; but my friend Miss Mainreed has done so."

"Has Miss Mainreed authority to grant this permission?"

"Miss Mainreed does very much as she pleases. Don't you, Fanny, dear?"

"Oh, that's because you are such a darling. You do not know, Mr. Varly, how good Miss de Lacy is; why in the village they simply worship her."

"Fanny," Isabel interrupted severely, horrified at her friend's outspoken praise of her to an utter stranger.

"I can quite believe it," Mr. Varly assented politely; but Isabel thought she detected a slight veiled sarcasm in his tone, and she felt intensely and unreasonably angry at the artist's presumption.

She rose saying:

"It is needless to prolong the interview, Mr. Varly; to please my friend, Miss Mainreed, I grant you permission to come every day to the Priory as long as you will find it necessary to do so to complete your picture. But I lay no conditions, and you will please not feel obliged to execute a sketch of the Priory in payment for this."

"Most certainly, madam, I shall not force any daub of mine on *your* acceptance," he laid stress on the pronoun; "but Miss Mainreed will perhaps honour me by accepting a rough outline of the old ruin, as a small token of my gratitude for her successful pleading in my favour."

"Thanks, awfully. I shall be delighted," Fanny frankly responded.

Mr. Varly bowed to Isabel.

"I am deeply obliged to you, madam, for the gracious permission you have been pleased to grant me," and again Isabel detected that same ring of sarcasm in his voice.

He turned to Fanny, hesitated; then both spontaneously held out a hand, and his leave-taking of her was most cordial.

"Good-bye, Miss Mainreed, I can't tell you how grateful I am to you."

When he left the room Fanny turned to her friend.

"Bell."

"Yes, dear."

"You are horrid!"

"Am I? I had no idea I could ever be that to you!"

"No, not to me, silly; you know you never are that to me, but to that poor young man."

"Well, child, were you not gracious enough to him for the two of us?"

"Oh, come. I suppose you will say I flirted with him, you always say that. But you know I can't help it, it is part of my nature to be amiable to all gentlemen when they are at all nice, like this Mr. Varly. Whereas you put your worst foot forward. I am sure he has gone away with the worst possible opinion of you."

"A matter of the most supreme indifference to me."

"Yes; but I cannot bear to think that any one can have a bad opinion of you, my own dear Bell."

"Well, my dear, you see I am a man hater, and in the presence of the objectionable sex I never do shine to my advantage."

"But a man hater is such an anomaly for a woman; there are heaps and heaps of women haters, like Lord Kitchener——"

"Oh," interrupted Miss de Lacy. "I see your theory is that men have a right to spurn us; but we must grovel at their feet and be ready to accept the first man who proposes to possess himself of our money-bags!"

"Tush, there you have mounted on your hobby again! Why I have no money-bags, not the very tiniest of wee ones, and yet I mean to marry!"

"There goes the tea bell, far more welcome than all these discussions on the merits of man!"

* * * * * * *

Four or five days passed, Isabel in her walks about the grounds avoided the Priory ruins, and therefore saw nothing of the stranger. Fanny went down twice or thrice to see the progress of the picture, chatting pleasantly with Mr. Varly each time. She spoke most enthusiastically of his talent as a painter, of his agreeable conversation, &c., and her friend laughingly answered by an allusion to the inflammatory nature of her little heart.

"You are quite shameless, Fan, you are actually carrying on two flirtations at the same time. I am quite sure the Rev. Mark Linten does not pay us the frequent calls he does for the sake of my society!"

Fanny flushed hotly.

"Well, I happen to meet Mr. Linten when I am visiting among the cottagers, or when I take a walk through the village, and he will insist on walking back with me. I cannot do less than ask him in to have a cup of tea with us."

"How strange that I never meet Mr. Linten when I go out. I wonder how much premeditation has to do with these chance meetings!"

"Oh, Bell, shut up, do, there's a dear; look, it is a lovely moonlight night," and she moved to the open window and looked out on the lawn over which was shed a halo of light almost as strong as the sun's rays. "Let us go out, do, we might saunter down to the ruins; you know at this hour you are quite safe from meeting the unfortunate knight of the mahl-stick to whom you so grudgingly gave permission to paint the dear old Priory."

"If you wish to speak the exact truth, you might just say it was you who gave the permission."

The two girls passed out arm in arm through the window, and a pretty picture they made in their white dinner dresses, just slightly open at the neck, with sleeves reaching only down to the elbow. They wandered past the shrubberies and beautiful sloping lawns, across the little wood till they reached the magnificent old ivy-covered ruins, which never looked so picturesque as when thus lit up by the silver beams of the moon.

Neither of the girls were superstitious, and they loved to roam about the deserted cloisters at night, quite regardless of the village legends which asserted that Hugo de Lacy's spirit could not rest in his grave, and that moans and groans proceeded from the Lady Chapel, where he was supposed to have expiated his crimes with prayers and fastings. They seated themselves on the well-worn steps of what had been the high altar, and awed by the solemnity of the hour and place, neither of them carried on their usual chaff and fun. Suddenly Fanny clutched her friend's arm.

"Oh, Bell! What was that?"

"Fan, child, don't be silly. I heard nothing."

"But I did hear; it was not fancy, it was just like a moan."

"Oh, come, what nonsense; just an owl hooting over the towers of the Priory."

"Hush! Listen! Oh, Bell, you must have heard this time."

There could be no mistake; both girls distinctly heard a deep-drawn moan, as of some one in great pain. The blood of the hardy Norman barons coursed through Isabel's veins; she did not faint or go into hysterics, but calmly said—

"Come, the sound issues from the Lady Chapel, just at the back of the cloisters, we must go and investigate what it can be."

Fanny was not so plucky as her strong-minded friend, but she was too unnerved to stop behind while Isabel went on to see what was the cause of these uncanny noises which caused them this feeling of uneasiness. Passing rapidly through the cloisters they stepped into the Lady Chapel, and the first thing they saw was the figure of a man lying prone on the ground, surrounded by a heap of stones, which seemed to have detached themselves from the wall and fallen on the unfortunate man.

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"Oh, Bell, Bell! it is Mr. Varly! He must have been killed by that old wall falling on him!" piteously exclaimed Fanny.

Isabel, always prompt in all her actions, was very soon kneeling by the unconscious figure.

"He is not dead, Fanny, or else how could his groans have attracted us here, but he is badly injured; our coming here to-night was providential; had he passed the night here he would have been dead before morning."

Fanny felt numbed and quite helpless; Isabel was calm and self-possessed, passing her arm under the injured artist's head, she gently raised it; a gaping wound from which the blood flowed copiously had been inflicted by a sharp stone just at the back of the head; she bound it up as best she could with her handkerchief and strips of her skirt, which she tore ruthlessly.

"Run, Fanny, as quick as ever you can to the house, and tell Johnson to come with the two footmen and a mattress so that Mr. Varly may be borne to the house with as few jars as possible, and send the gardener for Dr. Elliott."

"But, Bell, where is he to be taken to?"

"To the house, of course. When a human being is in trouble or suffering, he loses all personality, and is only a brother who needs our help and sympathy. Mr. Varly has been injured severely on my premises, through my fault, so to speak, from my negligence in not having the dangers of these crumbling walls seen to; and we are bound to nurse him and see that he pulls through."

Very gently the men bore the sufferer from the ruins to the house, and with the help of the old housekeeper, Mrs. Bently, who had been Isabel's nurse, they settled him comfortably in the big four-post bed of the best spare room.

When Dr. Elliott arrived he looked very grave, said it was a serious case, that most probably brain fever would set in after such a bad cut in the head. It was most unfortunate, he said, that the patient had lain for several hours before he was discovered.

The two girls shuddered to think what the consequences would have been, had they not mercifully had that strange fancy for a moonlight ramble.

The doctor's surmise proved only too true; the next morning the artist was in a state of high fever and raved incessantly, babbling of his mother and his childhood, as most of us do when old age or a severe illness overtakes us.

Isabel, Fanny, and Mrs. Bently watched and nursed him with untiring care and devotion. Isabel did not rest content with the opinion of the village practitioner; she felt herself responsible for the life of this man who had come to grief as she persisted in asserting, through her carelessness in not having the bad state of the ruins seen to, so she telegraphed to London for one of the ablest physicians of the day. His verdict was much the same as Dr. Elliott's. The patient could only pull through with the greatest possible care and forethought, half the battle lay in the nursing.

"Then we shall save him!" and Isabel resolutely set to with a will; the man should not die, she would save him, if human power could do so.

Mrs. Bently did her best too, though she repeatedly protested she did not know what the world would say to these two motherless girls having taken in this stranger with no one in the house but servants to act propriety.

"Come, Nana," Isabel would answer; she always clung to this familiar old name of her childhood, when speaking to her former nurse, "would you have me cast out that poor fellow when he nearly met his death in my grounds, and all on account of my culpable negligence, simply because that old viper, Mrs. Grundy, will pick holes in us? Besides, Nana, you are here to chaperon us."

Fanny suggested their having the curate in to play propriety; but Isabel did not quite see how the presence of two young men in the house, instead of one, would shield their reputation, so Mr. Linten contented himself with calling every day to inquire, and he caught glimpses of Fanny when it was possible.

After weary days and nights of watching, the crisis so much dreaded passed, and Harold Varley was pronounced to be out of danger at last.

"And I am sure our patient owes his life to you, Miss de Lacy—the most devoted of his three nurses," said Dr. Elliott.

With returning consciousness the young artist realised what had happened, and he showed the greatest distress over the trouble and anxiety he had given his nurses.

Directly he was pronounced to be out of danger and when he ceased to be delirious, Isabel's visits to the sick-room became very rare, and finally ceased altogether; she now left him exclusively to the care of Fanny and Mrs. Bently. Mr. Varly said nothing on the subject, but quick-witted Fanny noted the eager, wistful look in his eyes every time the door opened to admit any one, and how wearily he turned his head on the pillow when he found it was not Isabel who entered.

One day when he was alone with Fanny, he turned to her:

"Miss Mainroed, from the very first day I set foot here, you have been my friend; will you promise me one thing?"

"Depends on what that one thing is," responded Fanny warily, but smiling at the same time.

"I am quite strong enough now to be taken back to my lodgings in the village. Will you have me transferred there this afternoon?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Varly; after all the trouble we have had over your case it is most ungrateful of you to wish maliciously to have a relapse. You are absolutely unfit to be moved yet. Besides, Isabel would not hear of such a mad freak."

"It is just because I do not wish to t[illegible] further on

The kiss had hardly been given when the door softly opened and Fanny entered.

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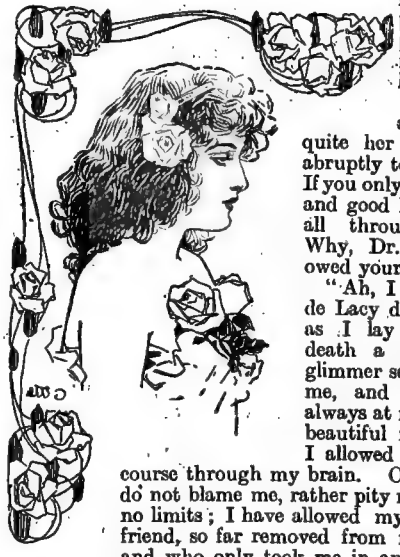

Miss de Lacy's hospitality that I implore you to allow me to leave this house."

"Well, it is not a nice way to requite her hospitality thus abruptly to leave her house. If you only knew how devoted and good Isabel was to you all through your illness! Why, Dr. Elliott said you owed your life to her!"

"Ah, I do know all Miss de Lacy did for me; often as I lay between life and death a sort of conscious glimmer seemed to return to me, and I could see her always at my bedside like a beautiful ministering angel. I allowed mad thoughts to course through my brain. Oh, Miss Mainreed, do not blame me, rather pity me, my folly knows no limits; I have allowed myself to love your friend, so far removed from me in every way, and who only took me in and nursed me out of pity, as she would have done a stray dog. There are times when I wish I had died in the ruins before this fatal love entered my heart. It is hopeless and will but wreck my life!"

Fanny gently took his hand.

"Hush, hush! do not excite yourself, you are hardly strong enough to battle against such strong emotions. Let me whisper a little bit of comfort to you. I do not think Isabel is so indifferent to you as you imagine."

"Oh, Miss Mainreed! surely it could not be—I so unworthy of her in every way; besides, how could I ever bring myself to ask her to be my wife, I, a poor struggling artist, when she is so wealthy. It would be degrading to my manhood to think of such a thing—I never could!"

"Tush! That's stupid pride."

"Well, but it is impossible she can love me; why, she never comes near me now, and I so hunger for the sound of her sweet voice, or one kind look from her eyes."

"Trust me, Mr. Varly, and all will be right; but you are not to talk of leaving this yet, till I give you leave, and perhaps you will not feel inclined to *then!*"

Fanny, on leaving the sick-room, went to seek her friend. Having vainly looked for her all over the house, a sudden thought struck her, and she went in quest of her in the grounds. Reaching the Priory ruins, she paused ere crossing the threshold of the Lady Chapel, as she caught the sound of subdued sobbing.

"Well, I do not suppose it is Hugo de Lacy's ghost crying over his murdered sweetheart!" she mentally ejaculated, as she passed under the archway and down the steps which led to the crypt of our lady's shrine. Isabel was seated on the fragments of the broken wall which had so nearly caused the death of Harold Varly; in her hand she held the beautifully-executed though unfinished sketch of the ruins which had lain forgotten in the Lady Chapel ever since the night of the accident.

"Bell darling!" softly murmured Fanny; and Isabel hastily sprang to her feet. With a guilty look she flung from her the picture at which she had been gazing.

"Really, Fanny, you should not creep up to people like this and startle them!" She had never spoken so harshly to her friend before; but Fanny heeded this not.

"Bell, why are you making yourself so needlessly miserable, why do you no longer come to see Mr. Varly?"

"Fanny, you presume too far on the privilege of friendship. I am not miserable," and she raised her head haughtily, "and if I were I do not quite see how my going to see Mr. Varly would make me happy. You evidently judge from your own feelings, and think *that* is the height of bliss!"

Fanny broke into a merry, rippling laugh.

"Oh, Bell, come, this is rich, you do not surely imagine that I am in love with Mr. Varly?"

"Well, if you are not, you have been trifling in the most unwarrantable, unladylike way with his affections, as he most certainly loves you, and you have given him every encouragement."

"Well, I declare, people do say love is blind, but I never before realised to what an extent! Why, Bell, have you been jealous of *me* all this time, and is it this which has made you so cold to poor Harold Varly, and driven him to the verge of despair? Surely, if you are not as blind as a bat, you would have known long ago that he worships the very ground you tread on!"

"Oh, Fanny, it cannot be, he and you are such friends, I have been thinking every day I should have to wish you joy of having secured the affections of the best and noblest man that ever was."

Fanny turned away her head to hide her blushes.

"Well, so I have, as a matter of fact, but not *the* man whom *you* think endowed with every earthly and heavenly perfection; mercifully, we women vary in our tastes, or else what rows there would be over the chosen few. This morning, as I was walking down the lane, I stopped at the stile and met Mark Linten, and—and—well, I have promised to be his wife. Will that convince you that I am not in love with Harold Varly, nor he with me?"

Isabel threw her arms around her friend.

"Oh, Fanny, please forgive me, I have been so rude, so snappish to you, but, oh, I have felt so utterly wretched in every way. I despised myself for having, as I thought, been so unwomanly as to let myself love a man who had never cast a thought on me!"

"Well, dear, I should be sorry to think of how many thoughts the poor fellow bestows on you, his very being is wrapped up in you."

"But, Fanny, how do you know all this?"

"I am not blind, and, besides, he has just confided his woes to me, and told me that never will he ask you to be his wife, because he is too poor, and you too rich! So there is the answer to all your fine theories about men seeking you for your gold!"

"But how are we ever to marry if he will not propose to me?"

"Why, propose to him yourself, of course!"

"Oh, Fanny, how could I?"

"What a nuisance you both are with your woman's pride, and his manhood's dignity! I am sure Mark and I were not half so fussy with all those high-flown sentiments. When we found out that we loved each other, he told me so quite plainly, and asked me to marry him, and I said 'Yes, thank you!' and then we kissed, and the whole business was settled in about ten minutes!"

Isabel could not help laughing over her friend's description of the curate's courtship of her.

"Well, dearest, and I am so selfishly engrossed in my own affairs that I have never even congratulated you. But I shall bring to bear all my influence upon my uncle, the Bishop, and see if I cannot secure Mr. Linten a good, fat living."

"Oh, you are a perfect duck! Now go to that poor fellow, and turn his black despair into ethereal bliss!"

Isabel repaired to her room, and, having donned her most becoming dress, a softly-tinted blue tea-gown with lovely frills and ruffles of old lace at the neck and wrists, she tapped at the door of the sick-room.

"Come in," was the response, but Harold had long ago given up expecting a visit from Isabel, and he did not look up from the book he was reading. She glided up to the bed and sank gently on the chair at his side.

"I am so glad you are better, Mr. Varly!"

At the sound of her voice, so long waited for in vain, he started, and a hectic spot gathered on either of his pale cheeks.

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"Miss de Lacy, this is indeed good of you to come to see me."

"I am afraid I have sadly neglected you lately," she whispered softly, "please forgive me."

"*I* forgive you? Why, Miss de Lacy, what have I to forgive? It is I who never can repay all your many kindnesses to me. But I am quite strong again now, and I wish as soon as possible to relieve you of the burden of my presence."

"Is my hospitality to you so irksome, then, that you are so anxious to be gone?"

"No, but—Miss de Lacy, you cannot understand what I feel on the subject."

"Yes, I think I do, in a way, Mr. Varly. I have been down to the ruins and seen your sketch of the dear old Priory. Won't you finish it when you are well enough to take up painting again, and give it to me, please? That is if you will be generous and forgive me my horrible rudeness to you that first day you called."

"Miss de Lacy, is it possible that any daub of mine can meet with your approval?"

"It is the fact of its being done by you which lends it all its charm in my eyes," this she said so low that it needed the quick ears of love to catch the sounds.

He took her hand and tried eagerly to scan her face, but she perversely and womanlike averted her eyes from his.

"Isabel, is it possible, but, nay, I am absolutely unworthy of such untold happiness."

"Well, but try, at any rate, if it lies within your grasp!" She still kept her eyes on him, but did not draw away her hand clasped within his.

"Isabel, my darling, you know I love you, but it is folly to think of wedding me, you, who can choose from among the highest and noblest in the land. Your pity alone dictates these compassionate feelings of yours for me. I shall leave this place, and you will soon forget the penniless young artist who disturbed your thoughts for a short time!"

"Nay, Harold, I am not going to let you wreck both our lives, yours and mine, for I could never forget you, and *never* think of marrying any one but you, so please do not be both proud and selfish."

"Good Heavens, do you call selfishness my condemning myself to perpetual darkness by exiling myself from your presence. Why, it is positive agony to me to think of it, only I want what is best for your happiness."

"Will you kindly allow me to be the best judge of that? I shall begin to think you do not love me."

"Isabel, doubt not that my love for you, deep and true, shines forth as the gold which has been through the refining influence of the cleansing fires. But, what will the world say? That I have married you for your money."

"What need we care for the world or its sayings if we are happy in each other's love!"

"My own true darling," and he drew her down towards him, and pressed a passionate kiss on her lips.

At this very critical juncture, when to them outside their own two selves, the whole world was blank, the door was gently opened and Fanny entered the room.

"Oh, my goodness! I am afraid I am intruding, but I knocked and knocked, so that I imagined Mr. Varly was asleep, and as it was time to give him his port wine I came in. But I suppose you were too much absorbed in each other to hear my taps, besides, I expect our patient is having a far more refreshing tonic than any port wine, however old the brand," and she looked mischievously at Isabel's crimson cheeks.

"Fanny, you are really too bad," remonstrated Miss de Lacy.

"Ah, well, bless you, my children! and she raised her hands with mock solemnity, "you have evidently kissed and made it up, like two naughty children. If any one were to write your love story, it might quite appropriately be called after Burne Jones' picture, 'Love in the Ruins'!"

Lily Butler.

£5 A WEEK FOR LIFE!

AND

£1,000 IN CASH CONSOLATION GIFTS.

THE MOST LIBERAL PRIZE EVER OFFERED BY ANY PERIODICAL IN THE WORLD.

The prize of £5 a Week for Life will be paid to the person (perhaps *you*) who correctly solves the set of pictures which appear in "PEARSON'S WEEKLY," under the conditions published in that paper.

Each of the pictures represents the name of a railway station in the United Kingdom, and every name will be found in Bradshaw's Railway Guide.

A further sum of £1,000 in cash will be distributed as consolation gifts amongst those who come next to the first winner in the following manner:

FIRST CONSOLATION CASH GIFT: £100.

2nd	Cash Gift	... ...	£50.
3rd	" "	... ...	£50.
4th	" "	... ...	£25.
5th	" "	... ...	£25.
6th	" "	... ...	£25.
7th	" "	... ...	£25.
8th to 57th	Cash Gifts	... ...	£10 each.
58th to 97th	" "	... ...	£5 "

So you see, even if you do not succeed in securing the first prize of £5 a Week for Life (*which will be paid under any circumstances*), you have a good opportunity of securing one of the cash prizes.

In order to form some idea of the size of the prize of £5 a Week for Life, we would ask you to glance over the following figures. Assuming that you live to the age of 70—which is quite reasonable—you will have received one of the following amounts, according to how old you are when you start receiving the prize:

If you are	60	you will have received	£2,600.
"	50	" "	£5,200.
"	40	" "	£7,800.
"	30	" "	£10,400.
"	20	" "	£13,000.
"	15	" "	£14,300.
"	12	" "	£15,080.

From this table you will be able to calculate exactly the amount of money which will come to you.

The first set of pictures will appear in the issue of *Pearson's Weekly* published on January 23rd. Order a copy to be reserved for you.

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Alma—a Sketch.

THE BARRIER BROKEN DOWN.

"Please fetch the book, Harry," said Nan with a confident air. "You'll find it, I think, on the library table."

I slid unwillingly from the rail of the verandah, where I had been sitting industriously watching the sunbeams caressing Nan's hair as she sat sewing. Ardently I wished that I might follow their example, but this my little lady would not suffer.

For months I had laid steady siege to her heart only to meet with repeated refusals from her. Had it not been for a certain something in her manner I would have been as utterly discouraged as she seemed to wish me to be.

Without being afflicted with great conceit, I was yet almost sure that she was not unmoved by my pleadings; some emotion, some response they woke in her that she could not always conceal, nor had she ever told me outright that she did not love me. When I put the question to her point blank, she always evaded it in skilful fashion. Once when I pressed her very hard she had hinted at some secret that was keeping us apart, but never again had I been able to lead her into any reference to it. To all my questionings she remained silent; to all my vows to win her in spite of any or everything, she listened, smiling rather wearily and saying that if she gave me time enough I would tire myself out. In the meantime she was glad to be my very good friend; more she would not be.

To-day we had been having a discussion concerning the wording of a quotation, so her challenge put me on my mettle. I assumed an air of confidence equal to hers and entered the house in search of the book, leaving the sunbeams for the time being master of the situation. They made her hair look so pretty that I did not grudge them their short supremacy.

I had heard Nan speak of her father though I had never seen him, so when I saw a white-haired man seated at the library-table I felt sure that it was he. He was writing and did not look up.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but your daughter——"

"Yes, yes, my daughter!" he interrupted eagerly, and I was startled by the melancholy of the dark eyes that he raised expectantly.

"Miss Nan sent me."

The light died out of his face. He pushed back the snow-white hair from his brow with a gesture of great weariness, then drummed idly on the table with his thin fingers.

"Ah! you mean Nan—yes, to be sure," he said dully. Then suddenly with an accent of apology. "But, pardon me, sir, you are looking for something—what can I do for you? Won't you be seated? You see I forget now that Alma is not here to remind me, and I am so engrossed in writing her life. That's odd, isn't it? She is dead, yet here is her life," pointing to the closely-written sheets of paper which were strewn about him. He pulled a budget from a long envelope.

"Here is a fair copy," he said, turning again to me. "Won't you read it—it's only a sketch."

I took the paper mechanically, feeling vaguely uncomfortable, but not knowing what else to do. He leant eagerly towards me.

"Sit down, sir, sit down," he commanded querulously. Fearing the result of opposition upon his apparently overwrought nerves, I again obeyed.

"I want an unbiassed opinion of it," he told me confidentially.

"They all tell me it is good and sometimes I think that it is, yet," mournfully, "I know I am not capable of doing justice to the subject; hers was such a beautiful life."

"I shall be glad to read it, sir, and will let you know what I think of it," I made answer, hoping thus to effect my escape. But I was not to be let off.

"No, no!" he replied quickly, "read it now; read it"—cunningly—"aloud."

Loath as I was to pry into any matter not intended for me I knew that I must humour him. My hands trembled, and I was strangely agitated as I unfolded the pages, for I was possessed of a feeling that almost amounted to certainty that the reason for Nan's refusal of my love was soon to be made clear to me. The reading of these pages seemed like disloyalty to her, and yet? I looked up before I began to read. Nan stood on the threshold of the room. Her eyes were brimming with tears but she nodded encouragingly to me, so my doubts were set at rest. This is what I read:

"Never shall I forget the day that she came to us, my darling, my blessing; how my pulses beat and my head reeled when the nurse laid in my arms this tiny living creature, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. My tears mingled with those on the mother's white cheek when I leant over to lay our treasure once more beside her. In the years that followed other little ones came to us and I loved them, but never, God forgive me, as I loved her. That first wondrous tendril that crept forth from the root of our happiness twined inextricably about the warmest spot in my heart.

"She was so like a beam of sunshine in the house; her first thought even as a little child seemed always to be for others. It is natural for us to idealise those whom we have lost, to fancy them as perfect, but I do not idealise my Alma. She had her faults like any normal child, though when she was taxed with any mischievous wrong-doing she admitted her fault and was ready to take her punishment. There was never any trickery or deception about her, and her fervid, 'I'm so sorry!' was something which her father, at least, could never withstand.

"One awful time there was when we came near to losing her. A dread disease of childhood attacked her, and for days her mind was fever-clouded. At last, one night as I sat holding her hot little hand in mine, she looked at me and, even in the dim light, I recognised the reason in her eyes.

"'Daddy,' she said feebly, and I made answer as best I could.

"'Alma's been very ill, hasn't she, daddy?'

"'Very ill, yes, darling,' I said, 'but you'll soon be better now.'

"'I think I will for I saw the angels, daddy, and I asked them please to let me stay because my daddy would miss me so. Don't cry, daddy,' and she fell into a peaceful sleep.

"She had asked the angels to let her stay so that I might not miss her! That was so characteristic of her—always considering the happiness of 'her daddy,' or someone whom she loved.

"As the years passed, and 'my little girl' grew into 'my daughter,' I watched her maturing beauty jealously, proudly, selfishly, dreading unspeakably the time when someone would take her from me. Kind indeed were the fates which withheld from me all knowledge of the future.

"It seemed at first that I was not to lose her, for, when she finished school, she begged to be allowed to take up the study of medicine under my direction so that we were together more constantly than ever. Our preference for each other

was of such long-standing that it was an accepted fact in the household and never caused any jealousy or unpleasantness. I was her guide, philosopher and friend, and she was my right hand man. She took entire charge of my study, kept my books, and copied my manuscripts whenever I would let her.

"For several years she was quite indifferent to the young men who sought her out. Their friend she was glad to be, but nothing more.

"'They are not any of them half so nice as my daddy,'" she told me laughingly.

"Even when the inevitable came she fought against her happiness for fear of grieving me, until her lover took the law into his own hands and told me how things were. He was a straightforward, manly young fellow, an engineer who had accepted an appointment that would take him to South Africa in a few months. He said that Alma loved him, but would not become engaged to him because she knew how we should feel to have her go so far away. I sent for Alma, and when she came shyly in I saw that what Fred had told me was true, so I gave her to him. I had had my full share of her bright young life.

"Even in her new-found happiness she never forgot me; devoting, in fact, so much of her time to me that at first Fred rebelled, but—

"'I shall be leaving him so soon, my poor old daddy,' she told him, 'and,' with a look that should have compensated him for anything, 'you will have me always.'

"On her wedding morning she came to my room in her spotless bridal white, and with her own dear fingers tied my necktie, and gently reminded me of one little point and another which she knew I should be apt to forget. Indeed I was in more need than usual of reminding that day, for I felt dazed and numb. I could not realise that after that day the old home would know Alma only for brief visits, the first of which could not be for many months.

"After she left us all her letters told eloquently of her happiness, and after she was settled in her new home she kept a sort of journal, which she sent us each week, so that we became quite well acquainted with some of her neighbours and surroundings.

"At the beginning of the second year she wrote with some uneasiness of Fred's failing health. A little later there was a break in her letters, and then a cablegram told us that he was very ill with fever. Then again came unbroken silence. We were nearly wild with anxiety over them, and when I could bear it no longer I arranged to go to them. Before I left I wrote rather sharply to Alma, telling her that in some way she should have managed to send us further word of how it fared with them. As soon as the letter was posted I regretted having written it, for I felt that I had been over hasty. My girl would not willingly have exposed us to this dreadful uncertainty. Something must be very wrong with one or both of them.

"When I at last arrived at their house in the hot little inland town there was an air of hush and gloom about it that sent a chill through me in spite of the heat of the sun which beat down upon me. As I mounted the steps leading to the porch the door was flung open and I was face to face with a white-haired surgeon, who had been a good friend of mine at home.

"'My poor old friend,' he said, as he wrung my hand, and looked pityingly at me.

"'Alma, man!—Alma!' was all that I could say.

"'The child is dead,' he said gravely, 'and, God help you, the mother's dying!'

"I flung off his kindly hand with something between a sob and a curse.

"'No, no, you would not let her die!' I said wildly, and rushed into the house only to be stopped on the threshold of a room by the shadow of Fred—gaunt, sorrow struck, white. The world seemed peopled with shadows that day, and the shadow of death lay over all.

"When I was calm again they led me in to her. It seemed at first that she would not know us, but when Fred spoke her name, though his husky voice sounded strange to me, she opened the glorious eyes in which the light of suffering still lingered.

"'Poor boy!' she said, as he clasped her hand. Then she saw me, and she smiled feebly.

"'Daddy, daddy, so you did get here. I'm so glad. I'm sorry I could not write, Fred will tell you,' she murmured, as I leant down to kiss her. The words cut me like a knife.

"'Take care of Fred, daddy,' she begged a little later. Her voice was weaker now. 'Try not to grieve too much for me—it's not really so hard to go though I have been so happy with you both. First daddy, then my Fred.' A wonderful smile broke over the pale face, with unwonted strength she raised herself slightly, and looked lovingly at each of us in turn, then, with a sigh, sank back among her pillows.

"'So happy all my life!' she breathed.

"The beautiful life was ended. My daughter, my Alma, had passed away. She had laid down her life for another—for Fred. He told me how, after she cabled to us, that he grew steadily worse, how devotedly Alma nursed him, hardly ever leaving his side.

"His pay had not come, and for a time she was sore pressed for money, and he being often delirious did not realise either this, or how unwise it was for her to tax herself as she was doing with the care of him. For a long time there was no doctor to warn him, for she, because of her knowledge of medicine, constituted herself both doctor and nurse in order to cut down expenses. It was only by chance that the old surgeon had called one day, because of a promise to me that he would look Alma up. He took matters in hand very quickly, but the mischief to Alma was done. While Fred mended slowly day by day, she grew weaker and less able to withstand the ordeal that was before her."

* * * * *

The old man sprang to his feet.

"And I wrote her that letter," he cried. "I wrote her that letter," he repeated, as the tears coursed down his cheeks. Nan came to him gently, soothing him as best she could. A man came hurrying in, looking very apologetic.

"I'm so sorry, miss," he explained. "I must have gone to sleep just a little minute, and your father slipped away," and he led the old gentleman out of the room.

Nan turned to me.

"Now you know all about it," she said tragically. "There's insanity in the family you see."

I put my arms around her, and she did not repulse me.

"Is that why you will not marry me, Nan?"

"Isn't that 'why' enough? When my own father——"

"But, darling, that's quite different. It's not hereditary or anything like that; it's simply the great trouble he has had, and the brooding over that letter. Isn't that so, sweetheart?"

If she had not looked so pathetic I could have laughed at her.

"I never thought of it that way, but I suppose it's true," she said. "Do you want to marry me now that you know, Harry?"

I considered that a superfluous question.

"Do you love me?" I asked.

And at last—

"Yes, yes, yes—ever so much," she answered me. I triumphed over the sunbeams. **May Hueston.**

Result of the "Feature" Competition.

THE Gramophone prizes in the above competition have been awarded to the following readers:

A. E. Piggott, 11 Clayton Terrace, Chapelizod, Dublin.
Miss A. Blair, South Bank, Atherton, Lancs.
L. E. Lydeard, 6 Woodbine Terrace, Hexham.
Jas. MacArthur, Main Street, Glengarnock.
W. Waters, 1 Hawthorn Villas, Aberkenfig, Glam.
J. Garner, 27a Lotherton Street, Harpurhey, Manchester.
B. Arnold, 57 Plumstead Road, Woolwich.
A. F. Vincent, 107 Faraday Street, Walworth, S.E.
W. Thomson, jun., Kirk Hill, Penicuik, Midlothian.
H. C. Flowerdew, Pied-à-Terre, St. Peter's Park, Broadstairs.

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Making it Sprout.

"WHAT on earth are you doing with that little water-can, Tommy?" "Sprinkling the baby's head so's his hair'll sprout."

Temporarily Incurable!

TIMPKINS: "Hallo, Simpkins, you've got your leg straight again? I thought you said it was incurable." Simpkins: "Well, you see, I got my damages against the railway company last week, so now I'm all right."

The Merchant's Device.

VISITOR: "Are all these ladies waiting for change?" Merchant Prince: "Oh, dear no! They are connected with the house. They stimulate trade by struggling with customers who try to approach the counter."

Heard at the Dance.

SHE: "But you don't know my name! What have you put on your cuff?" He: "Oh, I've put down 'Pearl Necklace.'" She: "But there are lots of pearl necklaces here!" He: "Yes; but I've also put down, 'Small and rather tight'—I mean the necklace, you know!"

A Large Order.

"AND the name is to be——?" asked the suave minister, as he approached the font with the precious armful of fat and flounces. "Augustus Philip Ferdinand Codrinton Chesterfield Livingstone Smith." "Dear, dear!" (Turning to the sexton): "A little more water, Mr. Perkins, if you please."

John's Industry.

"YES, I know," said old Mrs. Homespun, "John is sort o' lazy like about some things; so are we all for that matter. But he ain't downright lazy. He'll work hard enough when he gets the work that suits him." "It is good o' you to say so," said Uncle George, "but what kind o' work does suit him?" "Well," replied Mrs. Homespun reflectingly, "there's—there's—well, John is awfully industrious at smoking, for example."

Breaking It Gently.

SOME time ago a troopship was returning from abroad and among the passengers was an old lady, who had a favourite parrot, which she placed under the special care of one of the sailors. On going to attend Polly one morning he was surprised to find the poor bird dead, and knowing how very much upset the old lady would be to hear of the death of her favourite, and not feeling equal to imparting the sad intelligence himself, he employed a brother tar, who was famous for his gentleness in matters of that nature. Going up to the old lady with a very sad face and touching his cap he said: "I don't think that 'ere parrot of yours will live long, marm." "Oh, dear," said the poor old lady. "Why?" "'Cos he's dead," was the comforting reply.

Father Wanted the Light Put Out.

DAUGHTER: "I love him. He is the light of my life." Father: "Well—that's all right; but I object to having my house lit up by him after midnight."

A Soft Answer.

BROWN: "But why do you stop so often? Can't you keep up with me?" Typino (who is rather shaky in her spelling): "Oh, yes; but your language is so eloquent that I frequently find myself spellbound."

A Horse of Experience.

RIDING MASTER: "Give him his head, ma'am—give the horse his head! He knows more about this business than you do!" Miss Westend: "Well, he certainly ought to! I have had only one season's lessons, and he's had twenty!"

Didn't Want to Dust Unnecessarily.

SHE: "Is that friend of yours whom you are expecting a tall man?" He: "About six feet two inches. Why do you ask?" She: "Because in that case I shall have to dust the ornaments on the top shelf."

A Terrible Penalty.

MABEL: "That's what I get for giving my maid my cast-off Worth gowns." Constance: "What's happened?" Mabel (bursting into tears): "That rich old Moneybags caught her in a dark corner and proposed to her, and she accepted him."

Hopeless.

PHYSICIAN (severely): "I have no hesitation in saying, sir, that your wife's nervous fits were occasioned by your staying out so late every night." Witherby: "Good gracious, doctor, I didn't know she was suffering from an incurable disease!"

A Ruffled Air.

COUNSEL (cross-examining complainant): "Was the defendant's air, when he promised to marry you, perfectly serious, or one of levity and jocularity?" Complainant: "If you please, sir, it was all ruffled with him running his hands through it."

Base Ingratitude.

HE: "I am really surprised at Dr. White. After being our family doctor for years, and treating me for all sorts of things, and to think of all the money we've paid him, too!" She: "What has he done?" He: "He wouldn't pass me for the life insurance company!"

Time's Changes.

"I THOUGHT you said about a year ago that you would not ride a bicycle, as your husband did not like you to make yourself conspicuous?" "So I did." "Well, why do you ride now?" "For the same reason. My husband does not like to have me make myself conspicuous."

Tumley's Mistake.

MISS VERE DE VERE: "Only think, Mr. Tumley, they have a custom in Spain that when one admires anything the owner immediately presents him with it." Mr. Tumley (desperately): "I admire your hand very much, Miss Vere de Vere." "I beg your pardon, Mr. Tumley, but we are not in Spain."

Couldn't Injure His Cheek.

THE stories told about the brazen cheek of commercial "gents" have been increased in number by the following: Railway Official (breaking the news gently to the wife of a commercial traveller): "Ahem! madam be calm. Your husband has met with a slight—that is to say, one of the front wheels of a passenger locomotive struck him on the cheek, and——" Wife: "Well, sir, you needn't come round here in order to collect damages. You won't get a penny from me. If your company can't keep its property out of danger, it'll have to take the consequences. You should have your engine insured."

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OUR SPLENDID NEW SERIAL.

THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY.

A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

Mr. Brett's Quest.

A NUMBER of priceless diamonds having been most mysteriously stolen from an Albert Gate Mansion, and four of the custodians of the jewels murdered, Mr. Brett, barrister and detective, in conjunction with the police, is called upon to help clear up the mystery.

The diamonds, it appears, were sent over by the Sultan of Turkey in charge of a number of Turkish officials, and, being of political importance, the mission was placed by the British Government in the care of Mr. Jack Talbot, of the Foreign Office. Upon the night of the robbery and murder, Mr. Talbot disappears.

The Earl of Fairholme, being engaged to be married to Talbot's sister, intrusts Brett with the finding of Talbot.

Brett's first clue is the statement of Mr. Winter, a Scotland Yard detective, that Mr. Talbot and a lady have been seen in Paris, Talbot having signed his name in a hotel register. Brett goes to Paris to see if the signature is genuine.

On his way he falls in with Captain Gaultier, a King's messenger, from whom he learns that Hussein ul Mulk, the Sultan of Turkey's nephew, who had fled from Turkey, is in Paris. Gaultier promises Brett an introduction. Meanwhile Brett has discovered that the signature in the hotel register is not in Talbot's handwriting.

Brett now wires to Fairholme to join him in Paris.

He suspects Hussein of having caused the diamonds to be stolen, and with a view to eliciting information regarding Talbot's whereabouts, pays a visit to the Turk.

Hussein admits complicity, and even allows Brett to see the diamonds which his agent had just brought in.

No sooner does Brett see them than he discovers that the stones are imitations, and immediately tells Hussein so. The agent is furious, but Brett proves his assertions by crushing one of the gems under his heel.

The agent, seeing that the game is up, decamps, but his destination is ascertained by Fairholme, whom Brett had stationed outside the door.

Subsequently Brett and Fairholme together visit the Cabaret Noir, to which the agent had retreated.

This Week's Instalment.

"THIS is the Cabaret Noir?" said Brett questioningly.

"But yes, monsieur," said the waiter.

"There is no other of the same name in Montmartre?"

"But no, monsieur."

"A gentleman, a friend of mine, came here a few minutes ago in a fiacre. He was small, slight, so high"—illustrating the stature by his hand. "He was dressed in dark blue clothes with shiny boots. He was ——"

But Brett's eager description was cut short by the appearance of a new character. Through a narrow door leading into the bar came a handsome, dark-eyed woman, aged perhaps twenty-five, well dressed, shapely, and carrying herself with the easy grace of a born Parisienne.

Her hair was jet black. Her large dark eyes were recessed beneath arched and strongly pencilled eyebrows. Her skin had that peculiar tint of porcelain-white so often seen in women of southern blood when the face has not been tanned by exposure to the weather.

Yet there was nothing delicate in this lady's appearance or manner. A rich colour suffused her cheeks, and her language was remarkably free both in volume and style. She addressed a few observations to the waiter in the common vernacular of Montmartre, the only translatable portion being the question why he was standing about the floor like the ears of a donkey when there was work to be done.

Her manner changed somewhat as she addressed herself to Brett and his companion. There was sufficient of the landlady in her demeanour when she said, "And what would messieurs be pleased to command?"

Now if there was one type of femininity more than another which Brett thoroughly understood it was the saucy, quick-witted, handsome adventuress. He knew that the woman scrutinising him so coolly came well within this category.

He could not tell, of course, in what way she might be associated with the gang whose proceedings contained the explanation of Talbot's fate, but he instantly resolved to adopt a determined position with the lady who half-petulantly, half-curiously, was awaiting his reply.

He came nearer to her.

"I am glad," he said, "that I have met you."

The woman looked him boldly in the eye. "Was it for the happiness of seeing me that monsieur has visited the house?" she said.

"That might well serve as the reason," he answered, "but the pleasure is all the greater since it was unexpected."

"You are pleased to be facetious," she replied. "Will you not tell me your business? I have affairs to occupy me."

"Assuredly, I have driven here as quickly as possible from No. 11, Rue Barbette."

This attack, so direct and uncompromising, did not fail to have its effect. A stony mask of suspicion fell almost imperceptibly across the woman's impudent pretty face.

There was just a tinge of stage laughter in her tone when she cried: "Really, how interesting. And where is the Rue Barbette, monsieur? In what way am I concerned with—No. 11, did you say?"

Brett well knew how to conduct the attack upon this lady. His voice fell to a determined note, his eyes looked gravely into hers as he answered: "It is useless to pretend that you do not understand me. You are losing moments worth gold, perhaps diamonds! Within a few minutes the police will be here, and then it will be too late. Help me first, and

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I will let the police take care of themselves. Refuse me your assistance, and I will leave you and your friends to the mercy of the district commissaire."

A dangerous light leapt into the woman's eyes at this direct challenge.

"Monsieur is pleased to speak in riddles," she said. "This is a restaurant. We can execute your orders, but we are not skilled in acting charades. You will find better performers in the booths out there;" and she swept her hands scornfully towards the boulevard, with its medley of tents, stalls, and merry-go-rounds.

Brett smiled. "You are a wilful woman," he said, "and think you are serving your friends by adopting this tone. In effect you are bringing them to the guillotine. Now listen. If I leave you at this moment you do not see me again. You will know nothing of what is going on until the police have lodged you in a cell. Neither you nor your associates can escape. I promise nothing, but perhaps if you tell me what I want to know there may be a chance for you. Otherwise there is none. Shall I go?"

And he turned as if to approach the door.

For an instant the woman hesitated, and Brett thought that he had scored.

"Here," she said, lowering her voice, though there was still the menace of subdued passion in her accents. "Who is your friend?"

"A gentleman," he said, "whose identity in no way concerns you. You must deal with me, and it would be better if you had asked who I am."

"I know," she said laconically. "Come this way, both of you."

The Lady from the Circus.

SHE indicated a passage through a flap door located at one side of the counter. Brett followed her into a passage behind the doorway that led into the bar. Fairholme seconded him.

The trio passed rapidly through a door at the end of the passage, and quickly found themselves in a long, low room, usually devoted to billiards.

The place was dark and smelt evilly of stale tobacco. Daylight penetrated but feebly through the red blinds that blocked up three windows on one side. The woman drew two of these blinds, and thus illuminated the interior, but Brett quickly saw that the windows opened on to a yard, and the place was thus thoroughly cut off from all observation from the street.

"Now," she said, "I will show you something."

She walked towards the fireplace at the end of the room. On the mantelpiece was a square of iron sheeting, painted white and studded with curious looking spikes in circles, triangles, and straight lines. From a box close at hand she took half a dozen small glass discs, red and blue. She placed these in a line on some of the spikes at intervals of two inches. Then she retired to that side of the room where they had entered. The distance was perhaps thirty feet.

Before Brett or Fairholme could vaguely guess her intention she whipped a revolver out of her pocket. It would be idle to deny that they were startled, but the woman paid not the least attention to them.

She steadily levelled the weapon and fired twice, smashing the two outer balls of the six. Then she transferred the pistol to her left hand and smashed another pair. Then she turned her back to the target, adjusted a small mirror attached to the butt of the revolver, and smashed one of the remaining bulbs by firing over her left shoulder. Sweeping round with a triumphant smile towards the barrister, she said, "I can do that in fifty other ways, but five will suffice."

"It is very clever, madam," he said. "May I ask why I am indebted to you for this display?"

She replaced the revolver in her pocket. "It is my answer to your question, monsieur," she said. "That is the way I and my friends often talk to people who annoy us, and now I shall wish you good-day. You will find other sights in Montmartre to interest you."

Brett laughed easily, and bowed low.

"Believe me," he said, "I will find few performers so expert, and may I add, so discreet. We will meet again, and perhaps test your skill in other directions."

Without another word the party returned to the front room of the restaurant and Brett and Fairholme passed into the street where their cab was waiting.

"I suppose she meant," said Fairholme, "that if we were not jolly careful she would put a bullet through our hearts as easily as through those glass bulbs."

"Such was her intention," said Brett drily. "But women never have true dramatic genius. That was a piece of melodrama which might suffice with many of her class. It amused me, but it was a waste of time on her part."

"Anyhow," said Fairholme, "we shall not get much out of her in the way of information."

"Oh, yes, we will. She will tell us everything. She has told me a great deal already."

"What?" cried his lordship. "Did that shooting affair convey anything more to you than what I have said?"

"Of course. What need was there for such a trick? In the first place it is very simple. You or I could do it after ten minutes' practice with an expanding charge and a show pistol. Secondly, she admitted that the Cabaret Noir is a centre of operations for the gang in whom we are interested. By the way I should like to know her name."

He directed the driver to wait for them at a street corner some little distance further on. Close to where they stood an itinerant vendor was selling some mechanical toys.

Brett bought one. The price was twenty sous. He gave the man a two franc piece and refused the change.

"Do you know," he said, "who is the proprietor of the Cabaret Noir?"

"Certainly, monsieur," replied the gutter merchant; "it is Gros Jean. His name is, I think, Beaucaire."

"Ah. And the lady who lives there, a dark pretty woman with white skin, who is she?"

"That is his daughter," said the man. "She is known as La Belle Chasseuse."

"Why such a name?"

"Because she is clever with fire-arms. She used to be in a circus, but she left the profession a year ago."

"And does she live here constantly?"

"I cannot say. I think she goes away a great deal. She was travelling recently, she came back—let me see—last Tuesday evening."

"Thank you," said Brett. The two re-entered their cab, and Brett told the driver to proceed as rapidly as possible to the Rue St. Honoré.

"I hope to goodness," he said to Fairholme, "that Captain Gaultier has not left Paris already; these Foreign Office Messengers are liable to be dispatched to the other end of the earth at a moment's notice."

"Why do you wish to see him?" said Fairholme.

"Simply to obtain definite information of that which I already know. La Belle Chasseuse was the woman who accompanied the man made up to look like Jack Talbot during his journey from London. If Gaultier can see her and assure me that I am right I will simply be convinced concerning that which I already know to be true."

"By Jove," cried Fairholme, "that never occurred to me; I wonder if it is so."

"Mademoiselle Beaucaire is quite an adept in two things. She can break tiny glass bulbs and she can flirt. She chose to exhibit the first of these accomplishments to us, and convey what was intended to be a warning; in reality she gave us some valuable information."

ARE YOU IN NEED OF £10?
See page 73.

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"I suppose," said Fairholme, "that this crowd will watch us pretty closely, won't they?"

Brett leant back in the cab and laughed heartily.

"We are the most interesting persons in Paris to them at this moment," he said. "That poor chap who sold us the toys, and gave us the information we wanted, will have to change his position, I am afraid. One of them is following us now. Let's see who it is."

At the next street corner he stopped the cab suddenly, and jumped out, followed by Fairholme.

A minute later another vehicle dashed into the street. In it was seated a lady, closely veiled; but a large feather hat and the grotesque pattern of a black veil could not wholly conceal the pretty, determined face of La Belle Chasseuse.

Evidently she had no one at hand to undertake the mission, so she had followed Brett in person.

He signalled to her and her driver. Astonished, the man pulled up.

Brett instantly advanced and took off his hat with that pleasant smile of his which usually went straight to the female heart, but which now thoroughly lost its effect upon the furious young woman who looked at him from the interior of the voiture.

"Allow me," he said, "to offer my friendly services. It is a close day and mademoiselle has, I am sure, many other calls on her time. I will save you at least an hour, and myself nearly the same period. I am going to secure the presence of a witness to identify you as the lady who crossed the channel last Tuesday in company with a gentleman. You both drove to the Grand Hotel, and your companion signed the register there in the names of Mr. and Mrs. Talbot; is it not so?"

She bent forward and looked at them viciously. Her eyes sparkled with annoyance at being caught so easily in her self-imposed piece of espionage.

"Monsieur is clever," she said.

"Thank you," he replied, still smiling, "I can occasionally hit the mark with a guess as well as mademoiselle can with a pistol. But, believe me, I only intend at this moment to be polite. Of course, the presence of a witness to identify you is unnecessary. Mademoiselle can now return to the Cabaret Noir, whilst my friend and I will proceed direct to the Grand Hotel. It saves so much trouble, does it not?"

For a moment the woman looked as though she would have liked to produce that infallible revolver and shot him on the spot. Then she angrily commanded her driver to return.

Fairholme had surveyed the scene with open-eyed amazement. "Well," he said, "that beats anything. You really have a splendid nerve. The whole business reads like a chapter out of one of Gaboriau's novels."

"That is the way people live in Paris, my dear fellow. Life is an artificial matter here. But all this excitement has made me hungry. Let us have déjeuner."

On Guard.

On their way to the hotel, Brett, yielding apparently to a momentary impulse, stopped the cab at a house in the Rue de Chaussée d'Antin. Without any explanation to Lord Fairholme he disappeared into the interior of this house, a quiet, staid-looking place, and did not rejoin his companion for nearly ten minutes.

"It is perhaps not of much use," he explained on his return, "but I do not like to leave any stone unturned. The man I have just called upon is a well-known private detective, and I can trust him to look after my business without taking the police into his confidence. Two of his smartest agents will maintain a close watch upon both the Cabaret Noir and No. 11, Rue Barbette during the afternoon."

"You do not seem to expect much result?"

"No; we are tracking some of the most expert and daring scoundrels in France. It is hopeless to expect them to provide us with clues; they simply won't do it. No one but a genius in criminality would have risked such a dramatic move as the impersonation of Jack Talbot, or dared to put in an open appearance at the Grand Hotel. So my agents here can only

Tramped the Room in Pain.

A WOMAN'S SEVERE ORDEAL.

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"All my life I have been a great sufferer from indigestion, liver complaint, and neuralgia. I have walked up and down the room for hours, suffering terribly, and unable to keep still. Last winter, the

pains in my face, back, and chest were so bad that I could hardly breathe. Time after time I would be driven nearly mad with pain. For a month at a time I have been unable to get any sleep, and I became so despondent that I really thought I should never get better. I could not eat any solid food, but had to subsist as best I could on milk and similar nourishment. I went to nearly every druggist in the town, in the hope that I might obtain something to alleviate the pain, and spent pounds in this way, but with no result. I also obtained the advice of two medical men. They said the trouble was really due to indigestion, and gave me some medicine which relieved me a little, but I soon was as bad as ever again.

"At last a gentleman who called at our house recommended me to try Bile Beans for Biliousness as he said they had cured him of liver complaint. After I had taken a few doses the pains were much relieved. I continued taking the Beans until the neuralgia completely left me, and I have not been troubled with it since. The indigestion and liver complaint have both disappeared, and now I can eat and enjoy my meals without discomfort. As the result of taking Bile Beans I now feel better than I have done for years."

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hope at the best, to get sight of any messenger or assistant scoundrels who may turn up at either of the places indicated."

"May we expect to be busy to-night?"

Brett did not answer for a moment. It was evident that whilst he rattled on in a careless strain his active brain was busily employed in discussing the future.

"I hope so," he said at last. "Of course I cannot tell. Our only chance is that we may be able to guess the course of the hidden trail. If to-night does not yield us some information our chances of solving the mystery will be remote, in which case we may as well abandon the quest."

This faint-hearted reply naturally surprised Lord Fairholme considerably. To his mind a considerable measure of success had already been achieved, and he utterly failed to understand why his friend should take such a pessimistic view of affairs at the very moment when they appeared to be opening up somewhat. Brett noted the Earl's perplexity and smiled with genial deprecation as he said—

"Do not be afraid, Fairholme, I will liberate Mr. Talbot and clear his name so effectually that all difficulties will disappear from the path of your marriage."

"Then what is it that makes you so downcast?" cried Fairholme.

"I hate to be beaten at the final stage, and I have a premonition that were I in England—had I but the power to proceed unchecked and unhindered by officialdom—I would soon lay my hands upon the man who originated the Albert Gate mystery. But we are in France for the first thing—in a country of queer legal forms and unusual methods. At home I can always circumvent Scotland Yard; here I am in the midst of strange surroundings, and know not what may happen. Therefore, we must possess our souls in patience and await developments. The agent I have just employed has promised me to report every two hours at the hotel until eight o'clock. Then I will take personal charge of the Cabaret Noir, and——"

"What about me?" cried Fairholme.

"You, my dear fellow, will remain in my room at the hotel and await orders."

This arrangement did not seem to suit the active young Englishman who had been so suddenly plunged into the excitement of a criminal chase in Paris.

"Really, Brett," he said, "I hate to grumble at anything you propose, because you are always right, but you must pardon me for saying that I do not see what particular value my presence here has been to you."

"What?" laughed Brett, "not after your dramatic appearance in the Rue Barbette this morning."

"Oh, anyone could have done that. All I had to do was to break in a door at a given hour."

"Exactly so," said Brett, gravely. "I wanted a friend whom I could trust to implicitly obey my orders, and you did it. I am sure you will fall in with my wishes now."

So Fairholme was silenced on this point, but he ventured to put another question.

"How long am I to sit chewing cigars in your room, then?"

"All night if necessary. If I do not appear by seven o'clock to-morrow morning you had better go to the Embassy and tell one of the secretaries everything connected with our visit to Paris. He will then take action through the police in proper form, and after that you must simply await developments."

"Do you mean to say," said Fairholme anxiously, "that you are contemplating another risky bit of business to-night?"

"Once I take my stand outside the Cabaret Noir about 8.30 I cannot tell where fate may lead me. If I am lucky I will certainly return, whatever be the personal outcome. If, on the other hand, I learn nothing, you may as certainly expect to see me about 2 o'clock a.m."

£5 a Week for Life.

Turn to page 85.

At the hotel Brett found awaiting him a letter which had been delivered by the mid-day post. It was from his elderly assistant in London, whom he had told to make a close scrutiny of all inhabited houses within a certain radius of the Carlton Hotel. The man had done his work systematically, and in only three instances was he called upon to report doubtful cases. Two foreign restaurants in side streets contained a number of residents concerning whom it was difficult to obtain specific information.

One of these establishments he believed to be a resort of Continental gamblers driven from Soho by the too marked attentions of the police. The other was a place of even more questionable repute, and in both instances he had utterly failed to obtain the slightest information from the servants, who apparently "stood in" with the management.

The third dwelling which courted observation was a flat situated above some business premises in another quiet street. So far as he could learn, it was tenanted by an elderly lady who was a helpless invalid, and was waited on by a somewhat curious couple.

"They are Italians, I think," wrote the ex-policeman, "and are very uncommunicative people. I have twice called, on one pretext or another, but when the door is opened it is always kept on the chain, and I cannot see more than the face of a man or woman and a few inches of wall beyond. Still, I have no reason to doubt that the view taken by the milkman and baker is correct, namely, that the owner of the flat is confined to her bed and is suffering from a nervous disease, which renders it imperative she should be shut off from all noise. The landlord informs me that these people have occupied the place for nearly two months. Their rent is paid in advance, and they have not given the slightest cause for complaint. There are, of course, in this district a large number of private hotels and lodging-houses, but they seem to be run on regular lines, and although some of their patrons might well demand closer observation, I have come across nothing suggestive of any suspicious circumstance whatever with reference to them. I have kept back my report until I was able to give details concerning the other houses in the district, and I will now fall back upon the second part of your instructions, *i.e.*, to maintain a close watch upon the three establishments which I have picked out as being more unusual in their habits than the others."

This was all.

Preparations.

Brett read the concluding portion of the report to Fairholme.

"He is a level-headed, shrewd chap who sends this communication," he said—"one of the few men whom I can trust to do exactly what I want, neither more nor less. I think when we return to London we must endeavour to get that chain taken off the invalid lady's door, or, at any rate, obtain some specific facts concerning her disease from her doctor."

Fairholme smiled. "I am glad to hear," he cried, "that you do anticipate our return."

"Oh," said Brett airily, "I never count on failure."

Soon after three o'clock a report arrived from the agent in the Rue du Chaussée d'Antin. It read:—

"Nothing unusual has occurred in the vicinity of the Cabaret Noir. The customers frequenting the place are all of the ordinary type and do not call for special comment.

"A Turkish gentleman quitted the house, No. 11 Rue Barbette, at 1.15 p.m., but returned shortly before two o'clock. Half an hour later a man, whom my assistant recognised as a member of a well-known gang of flash thieves, entered the place. His name is Charles Petit, but he is generally known to his associates as 'Le Ver.' He is small, well dressed, and of youthful appearance, but really older

(*Continued on page* 94.)

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Statistics for the Deaf.

FROM an analysis of 1,000 cases of deafness which have come under his personal observation, the editor of the "Journal for the Deaf," has been able to prepare some remarkably interesting facts. These are contained in a special article in the December issue of this publication. Catarrh of the ear, discharging ears, nose and throat complications, influenza, colds in the head and rheumatism are all carefully considered as causes of deafness. Different forms of treatment are discussed, and a large number of cases described, which have been cured by the Drouet method of external application, after other procedures (even operative) failed; in one case, in particular, two aurists, an operation, and artificial aids to hearing had given no relief. As names and addresses are given, these cured cases can be communicated with by anyone who desires to make further inquiries on the subject. To obtain a free copy of the Journal, it is only necessary to address—The Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. With the Journal is also enclosed a Report Form, by means of which anyone can obtain free advice by correspondence, with full instructions for home treatment.

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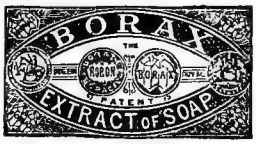

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Remarkable discovery that will interest every woman with superfluous hair. Perfectly safe treatment that permanently destroys the roots, fully described, FREE to all.

Hairy women need no longer despair. Out of the mass of failures has come a genuine success. Their unsightly blemish can be so thoroughly destroyed that they themselves will wonder if they ever really had disfiguring hair.

The Capillus Mfg. Company are in sole possession of a marvellous home method that removes superfluous hair for ever. It goes to the very root of the hair, and destroys its life, so that it will never grow again.

The Company want it understood that this method is different entirely from the many powders, lotions, and cosmetics sold that only remove temporarily and hurt a delicate skin, while this new method removes the hair for all time, and is simple and harmless.

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"ANTEXEMA"—You may try it FREE.

Are you tortured from morn till night with burning, itching, scalding Eczema—worse when you get into bed; no rest day or night; the various remedies you have tried have been of little benefit? If you suffer like this, or with any skin trouble, great or small, send for a free trial sample of "ANTEXEMA," together with copyright treatise on "Skin Troubles," and 200 testimonials from grateful sufferers who have been cured. Sent in plain wrapper, post paid. "ANTEXEMA" is sold by all chemists at 1/1½ (post free from us for 1/3). Refuse injurious substitutes.

THE "ANTEXEMA" COMPANY, LONDON, N.W.

than he looks. He is still in the house inhabited by the Turks."

"What is the meaning of 'Le Ver'?" said Fairholme.

"It means 'The Worm,'" answered Brett.

"I must say these chaps do find suitable nicknames for one another. I wonder if he is the fellow we followed to Montmartre this morning?"

"Possibly, though I am puzzled to understand why he should trust himself in that hornets' nest again. Most certainly the description covers him, but we shall probably hear more details later. I wonder where the Turkish gentleman went whom 'Le Ver' seems to have followed. He could not have gone to the Cabaret Noir in the time?"

Brett's curiosity was answered to some extent by the next report, delivered about five o'clock. It read as follows:—

"Le Ver is still in the house No. 11 Rue Barbette. My agent explains that he did not follow the Turk who left and returned to the place earlier, because his definite instructions were not to leave the locality, but accurately report upon all persons who entered or left. Absolutely nothing has transpired in this neighbourhood since my first report.

"Gros Jean, the father of La Belle Chasseuse, arrived at Cabaret Noir soon after four o'clock. My agent ascertained from the cabman who drove him that Gros Jean had hired the vehicle outside the Gare de Lyon. Otherwise nothing stirring."

At seven o'clock came developments.

"Three Turkish gentlemen have quitted No. 11 Rue Barbette, but the Frenchman is still there. As it might be necessary to follow another person leaving this house, I stationed another watcher with my assistant, and this second man followed the Turks to a restaurant in the Grand Boulevard. So far as he could judge, they seem to be excited and apprehensive. They drank some wine and conversed together in low tones. At 6.15 they quitted the café and rapidly jumped into an empty fiacre, being driven off in the direction of the Opera. So unexpectedly did they leave their seats that before my agent could hire another cab they had disappeared in the traffic, and, although he drove after them as rapidly as possible, he failed to again catch sight of them. I have reprimanded him for his negligence, although he did right in at once coming to me to report his failure. In accordance with your instructions, I have ordered the watchers at the Café Noir and in the Rue Barbette to be in this office at 8.15 p.m."

"Now I wonder," said Brett, "why the Turks left the Frenchman alone in No. 11. It is odd, to say the least of it, for since the dramatic discovery of the spurious diamonds this morning they must be even more in the dark than I am. That must be looked into, but I cannot attend to it now. At this moment, if I am not mistaken, the centre of interest is the Cabaret Noir."

The two men occupied a sitting-room on the first floor of the hotel, and their respective bedrooms flanked it on each side. Brett explained that he could not tackle the table d'hôte dinner, so he made a hasty meal in their sitting-room and then excused himself whilst he retired to his bedroom to change his clothing.

He was absent some twenty minutes, and Fairholme amused himself by glancing over the copies of the day's London newspapers which had recently arrived. Suddenly the door of Brett's bedroom opened, and a decrepit elderly man, a shabby-genteel individual, disfigured by drink and crumpled up by rheumatism, appeared.

"Who the dickens——" began Fairholme.

But he was amazed to hear Brett's familiar voice asking:

"Do you think the disguise sufficiently complete?"

"Complete," shouted Fairholme, "why, your own mother would not know you, and your father would probably punch me for suggesting it could be you."

"That is all right," said the barrister cheerfully. "I will now proceed to get quietly drunk at the Café Noir. Good-bye until seven o'clock to-morrow morning—perhaps earlier, and perhaps—well, no—until seven o'clock!"

They shook hands and parted, and not even Brett, the cleverest amateur detective of his day, could have remotely guessed where and how they would meet next.

(To be continued in next Tuesday's "Short Stories.")

Principal: (to the new apprentice) "Has the book-keeper told you what you have to do in the afternoon?" Youth: "Yes, sir. I was to wake him when I saw you coming."

He: "I am delighted with my new doctor. He promises to make my rheumatism disappear within a month." She (shocked): "But then we shall have to buy a barometer."

"I don't see how you dare trust yourself to young Dr. Pills. He hasn't any patients." "That's just the point. He'll strain every nerve to keep me alive. I'm his only source of income."

Young Man: "I assure you, sir, I look forward longingly to the union with your daughter." Girl's Father: "Ah, well, that's a candid confession, anyhow. She'll certainly bring you there if she's half as extravagant as I've allowed her to be."

A Regent Street milliner put a basket that had four kinds of paint over it, and had been run over by an omnibus, in her show window, and crowds of women stopped to look at it and to study it, and they went home resolved to have one of that new style of bonnet.

Sir Marmaduke Jamm: "William, my cigar boxes have emptied themselves with uncommon rapidity during the last month. Is it possible that during the short period you have been in my service——" Valet: "No, sir, I have still in my possession three boxes of my late employer's."

Mr. Laffan (humourist, looking up suddenly from his work): "My dear, I do wish you would break yourself of that silly habit of laughing out loud when you are reading. How do you expect me to do anything——" Mrs. Laffan: "But it's the manuscript of your own book I am reading, dear." Mr. Laffan: "Ah, yes—certainly—of course! Ah—what was I saying? Oh, yes—wonderful how much more work I can do at home than I could at the office, isn't it, Marie?"

The Art of Beauty.

Price 1s., post free 1s. 2d.

Some of the Contents:

The Cure of Stoutness—The Cure of Leanness—The Figure—Bad Complexions, How to cure them—The Hair in Ill Health—Moles, Warts, and Superfluous Hair—Cure for Acne—Types of Beauty—How to Improve the Bust—The Eyebrows—The Eyelashes—The Figure.

Cut this out and send it with 1s. 2d. and your name and address to the Book Publisher, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Book sent on receipt of order and money.

ASTHMA

WHY ? ? is it generally thought there is no cure for **ASTHMA, CHRONIC BRONCHITIS. SHORTNESS OF BREATH, EMPHYSEMA, BLOOD-SPITTING, HAY FEVER,** and other Lung Complaints.

BECAUSE ! ! the usual treatments only confine themselves to combating single symptoms instead of attacking the root of the disease.

BE SURE THERE IS ONE

ABSOLUTE LASTING CURE.

Sufferers will receive, post free, **Free of Charge,** particulars of the famous WEIDHAAS HOME TREATMENT when applying to THE PAUL WEIDHAAS HYGIENIC INSTITUTE, 16 T.A. Buckingham Road, Brighton.

Mr. Weidhaas has tried the Treatment on himself, after having been given up as incurable, and cured himself, and had then practised it for over 19 years in many thousands of special cases. Many having suffered for over 40 years have been cured by his Treatment (in some instances even at the age of 70 or 80 years), after having been **GIVEN UP AS INCURABLE.**

Mr. O. DEACON. (From Photo.)

No interference with daily occupation. Send description of complaint, and mention if you suffer from **COLD FEET.** Read the following Testimonial, one out of thousands received:

SEVERE CASE OF CHRONIC BRONCHITIS CURED.

Your cure has done wonders for me; I feel quite a new man. I do not have any of those drowsy and languid feelings, no bad taste in the morning, do not spit any phlegm, do not have any thumping of the heart as I used to, can enjoy food, do not have any pain after eating. No man can be more thankful than I am to think I am relieved of that terrible complaint, and I owe everything to your cure. My friends tell me I should have been a dead man before now if something had not been done for me. Please accept my thanks. OWEN DEACON. Hurst. (Full address on application.)

The Director is prepared to pay **£1,000** to any Charitable Institution if the above is not a genuine extract from the patient's own letter. The original may be seen at the Paul Weidhaas Hygienic Institute by any bona-fide enquirers.

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CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence,

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Hats and the Girl.

"ALFRED" often does shopping where there are lady assistants. Sometimes he chats with them. Should he, on leaving the shop, raise his hat?

* * * *

It is not a rule in this country to do so, as it is on the Continent, but I think there are many cases in which we should greatly improve ourselves by adopting foreign manners. This is one of them. If you have chatted with the girl, apart from the nature of your business, you are recognising her claims to social courtesy. On leaving, you could quite rightly raise your hat. I do not say make an elaborate bow, but a slight inclination simply. Many men do it, and nothing is lost to themselves.

Addressing a Daughter.

"CHARLES G." inquires: "Is it a breach of etiquette to address a letter to an only daughter, using her initial, as in "Miss H. Brown?" Should it be "Miss Brown" only?

Yes, if she is the only daughter, and is grown up, and there is no senior Miss Brown of another branch of the family staying in the house.

A Tale of Rivals.

"EL ME" has been engaged to a girl for three years. In the same house as herself a gentleman is staying, who has been there for eighteen months. He has noticed, to use his own words, "that she lacks the sentimental expression which she used to have." Also that the man has paid her marked attention, though he knew of her engagement. He has also given her presents. During this time the young lady has twice written to "EL ME" to ask him to break off the engagement, and each time has followed these letters by a desire for its continuance. When questioned as to the reason for wishing to break it off, she said she believed the "other man" loved her more than my correspondent.

* * * *

It is evident that there is something weak in the girl's affection for you, "EL ME." I imagine the other man has gained a hold on her which is decidedly prejudicial to your own chances. His living in the same house has given him an advantage over you which is likely to prove very strong. You might have foreseen this from the first. I hope, for your sake, it is not too late. Evidently the girl suspects you of lukewarmness for not having outwitted him long ago, and possibly she is right. Are you really very fond of her? Or is it just your vanity that has been wounded by a successful rival? Think it well over, and, if you find that her having gone over to him is a matter you can regard with coolness, give her up and turn your attention elsewhere. A girl so changeable and inconstant does not seem a very enviable possession for a man.

How to Become Reconciled.

"ROO" writes, I have had a difference with my *fiancée* on some trifling affair. It has become so serious that we have not spoken for two days. I want to make it up, but am nervous about approaching her after our difference.

* * * *

I should take the next opportunity of speaking to her without mentioning the difference at all. Give the impression that you have entirely forgotten it, and are on the same footing as before. If she is really fond of you, she will soon resume her normal attitude towards you, and will not wait for such a formal and unsatisfactory thing as a reconciliation by apologies. I have known many squabbles settled like this. Nobody's pride is injured, which, I suppose, is the chief consideration to you.

Sudden Coldness.

"EILEEN" has been "keeping company" with a young man, who seemed devoted to her. Suddenly, without any explanation, he withdrew his attentions, and now is only coldly polite. "EILEEN" is very fond of him, so is quite miserable at this turn of affairs.

* * * *

There was certainly no justification for his conduct. If the young man has heard anything about you which has made him change his attitude, he should certainly have let you know of it. I should write to him and ask an explanation. If he does not give it, then you must conclude that he has been merely trifling with your affections.

A Lax Reader.

"PERPLEXED" (Pretoria).—I fear you do not read your "In Confidence" as regularly as you might, or you would have seen that in the issue of November 8, Miss Morris dealt with your case at length. In case you should be equally lax in regard to this paragraph, I have written to you to this effect, and sent you a copy of that number. Now, is it not rather thoughtless for a business man to send over Transvaal stamps for use here in replying to your letter? They are, of course, very nice to give to one's stamp-collecting friends, but have no postal value in Britain. However, I have sent them back to you privately, and only hope that you will find a ready way out of your trouble.

A Case for Interruption.

"J. H." was walking out the other day, and met his *fiancée* in the street, deeply interested in the remarks of a strange man. Should he go up and speak to her under the circumstances?

* * * *

I rather think so. Naturally you would wish to know all about the conversation with the strange man. And no *fiancée* would be of the right sort if she exchanged intimacies in the street with men which she did not wish her lover to hear. Besides, it might only have been her uncle or second cousin, and perhaps they were only talking family matters.

Calf Love.

"MATER" writes to me to say that her young son, seventeen years old, has fallen in love with his landlady's daughter in the country town where he works. What can she do to prevent matters from becoming dangerous? The boy is only getting a small salary in an office.

* * * *

I would privately ask the landlady to keep an eye on him if I were his mother, either in a letter or by going to the country town and seeing how matters stand. But probably the boy is not in love at all. At seventeen one usually falls in love, anything up to a dozen times, with a wide variety of people, but seldom is one so desperately foolish as to allow things to develop into premature marriage.

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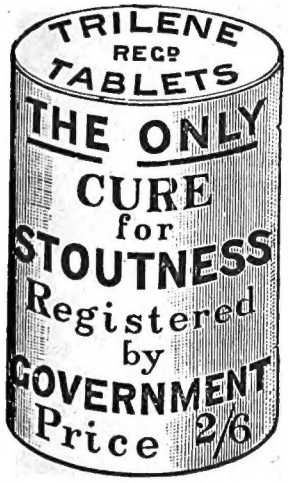
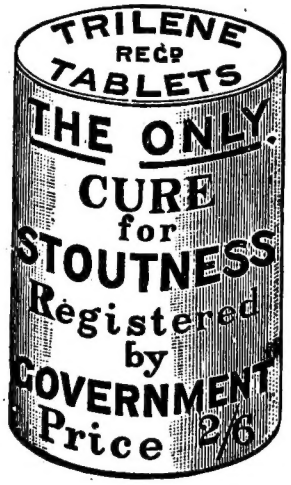


For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."



Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION 66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18.b. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1901 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets.

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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So Rich and Creamy, yet will not disagree.
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